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ARGOSY



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The WH Brand

A Cattle Country Novel

by F. R. Buckley

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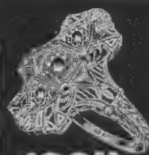
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ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and

LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE.,
16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C. 2

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer

C. T. DIXON, Vice-President

PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Single copies, 10 cents; by the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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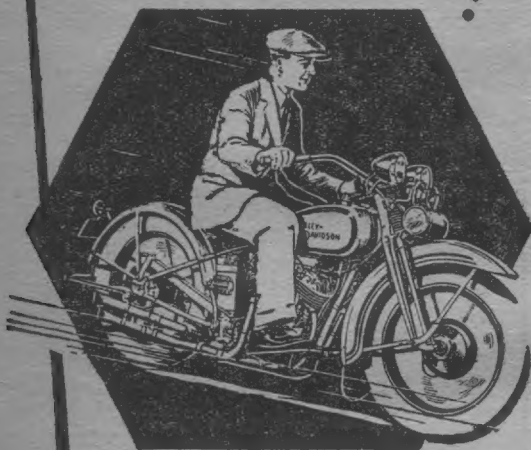
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ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 207

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1929

NUMBER 6



The WH Brand

Jack Foster had a reason for coming to the curious WH ranch—a reason almost as surprising as the adventures that awaited him there

By F. R. BUCKLEY

CHAPTER I.

A FOREMAN'S WELCOME.

BOUNDED on the south by the Rio Grande, which, between its low banks, glared like steel polished beyond the art of man; fenced in on two other sides by the heat-shimmering blue of hills; and merging, westward, into the expanse of gray green

that was Hurst County, Texas—the WH Ranch lay baking placidly under the sun of an August noon.

Somewhere out of sight, doubtless, punchers assigned to stock-inspection were looking enviously at the long-horns lying lazily in the shadow of trees near water-holes. Certainly—since fences always choose the hottest days to break down—some wretched

line-rider somewhere on the place was swearing drearily at his wire-puller, and wishing the sweat would stay out of his eyes for anyhow thirty seconds.

But around the ranch house, the bunk house, the corrals and the barns which formed the nucleus of the WH, all was peace and desertion. The wide veranda of the house, though deep in purple shadow, was deserted; the curtains at the open windows hung dead in the lifeless air; the benches outside the bunk house door presented bare surfaces to the sun's stare; and the cook—having stated where he would go if he hung over a hot stove a minute after 11 A.M.—was asleep in the shadow of his cook-house.

The only signs of life were given by the tail of a dog which lay dozing under the porch steps; and by the pony and person of a young man who, riding up to the bunk house door, there came to a halt and looked about him.

He was, considering the place and the weather, a rather extraordinary-looking young man; not so much in bodily appearance—though people had been known to glance twice at the set of his eyes and the breadth of his shoulders—as in point of dress.

His hat, which was wide and white and slash-dented in the front of its crown, was the worst thing about him; it had four visible finger-marks on its brim. But his neckcloth made up for that—one could have shaken it for half an hour without dislodging even a grain of alkali dust. The same might have been said of the khaki shirt and trousers; which latter were tucked, with almost the effect of riding breeches, into the tops of boots whose spurs glittered with burnishing.

—Even the pony, though of that serviceable shade used for raincoats and army uniforms, looked as though he

had recently come from the dry cleaner's; and as he stood, head down and nostrils flaring, in the white-hot space before the bunk house, he switched flies with a tail that had evidently been combed that very day.

Only by inspection of the war-bag, whose top had escaped Jack Foster's notice during his toilette at the river, could an observer have deduced that horse and rider had arrived, not from a bandbox, but from a long and dusty journey.

"HI!" said the rider, in a voice that would have confirmed the deduction. It was a goodish voice, of the barytone persuasion; but something seemed to have gone wrong with it. The young man tried again. "Hi!"

There was no answer. Possibly the inhabitants of the bunk house, half asleep after the midday meal, mistook the sound for the creaking of an ungreased wagon-wheel; or perhaps—so feeble it was—they did not hear it at all.

Mr. Foster looked long at the doorway, and decided to dismount, which he did stiffly. He walked, with the gait of one who has been long on a horse, to the threshold; and in that more advantageous position, tried again.

"Hi!"

He succeeded this time.

"For the love of Mike," came a drowsy voice within, "who's doin' the train announcin'?"

"Why'n't you go an' see?" suggested another voice with a yawn. There was a sound of somebody turning in his bunk, followed by a gentle snore. Nothing else. The young man on the doorstep considered, and peered into the obscurity.

"Is anybody home?" he inquired; and it was noticeable that, as he did so, he held rather tightly to the lintel. Also his knees were trembling. Washing and grooming and combing to the contrary notwithstanding, one does not ride across five Texas counties in August on a total capital of one dollar and forty cents, without showing it in some way.

"Naw," came a third voice. "Nobody home. We're all away visitin' the Prince of Wales, teachin' him how to stay on a hawse."

There was a feeble snicker from within, followed by another snore.

"You're a dirty lot of bums," said Mr. Jack Foster.

A moment of paralyzed silence.

"Huh?" asked the voice which had last spoken.

"I say you're a dirty lot of bums," repeated the young man through his teeth. "This is Texas hospitality, is it? Well, thank God I come from Arizona, then."

"Aw, say—" began the voice apologetically; but was drowned out by a stronger.

"You shut up," said a heavy bass; and there was the sound of boot-heels on a board floor. Blinking as the sun struck across his eyes, a man came to the door; a big man, half-undressed, unshaved, and in most other ways, just the visitor's opposite.

He had, for instance, blue eyes instead of brown, with red rims in place of the usual pink; and teeth which, from a succession of tobacco-quids such as he now rolled in his cheek, were a great many shades nearer to black than to the conventional color. The blue shirt, covering the thick shoulders, was stained, and patched with ill-assorted materials; and the arms and hands which emerged from his sleeves

represented a large and wholly untouched market for soap.

"D' anybody ask you to come from Arizona?" asked this gentleman.

Mr. Foster stepped back a pace. There are several ways of performing this movement, simple as it is. The manner adopted by Mr. Foster was the one which, in the ring, makes opposing prize fighters tuck their chins a little closer to their shoulders.

"No," he said.

"Then what you kickin' about?" asked the big man, grinning. "If you don't like it here, go back where you came from."

THE mild voice which had mentioned the Prince of Wales, broke into protest.

"Hey, Bill," it said from the darkness, "that's no way—"

"You shut up!" snarled the big man. "Well, stranger; what next, if anythin'?"

"Are you," asked Mr. Foster, "the boss around here?"

"I'm the foreman, if that 'll do you any good. Not that it will."

"Do you want a man?"

The foreman baptized an inoffensive tree-swift with tobacco-juice.

"Man?" he said vaguely. "Where is there one?"

"Here."

"Where?"

"Here," said Mr. Foster, with a lack of clearness due to the sinking of his teeth in his lower lip. "Here right in front of you, standin' outside your bunk house an' nearly passin' out for a drink of water, you—"

"Aw, say, Bill!" said the mild voice again. There was a sound as of several men rising.

"You interrupted the gentleman just as he was about to say somep'n,"

said the foreman. "What was it you was goin' to call me, stranger?"

"I was askin' you if there was a job goin'," said Jack Foster slowly. "Is there?"

"I'd thought," observed Bill, "that you had somep'n else on your mind, such as lettin' your angry passions rise, or the like of that. Well, as regards this job, now; I reckon you come to the wrong place for what you want. See, this is a cow-punchin' outfit—the WH, meanin' Woman Hater. It don't really mean that, but that's what we call it. So I don't believe it'd suit you. There ain't no boss's daughter for you to marry, like they do in the story-books; in fact nothin' female on the place except cows, an' if *they* was to see that fancy neckcloth—"

"You haven't a job for me, then?"

"Naw. Y' see—"

"What I was goin' to call you, awhile back," said Foster, moving his feet almost imperceptibly in the sand, "was a dirty-faced coyote. I was wrong. You're too fat for a coyote, and besides, coyotes keep themselves clean with their hind feet. How'd you like to be called a mangy skunk?"

The foreman's eyes popped a little wider open, and his fists clenched themselves into balls—about the size of grapefruit, they were, but indescribably knobbier. Uttering an unintelligible sound which contained the essence of at least four different oaths, he left the doorsill and took one step forward, at the same time getting his right arm into the proper position for an uppercut.

THIS was absolutely all he did; so that he was considerably surprised to find himself waking up under the stove at the far end of the bunk house; surprised, but by no means

dismayed. Through the doorway—as soon as this had ceased to rock from side to side and erupt stars—he could see the form of Jack Foster, now divested of hat, neckcloth and shirt, and surrounded by half a dozen WH punchers, all staring; and he correctly surmised that it was to this young man that he owed his sleeper-jump. He got up, one hand to a cut on the point of his jaw, and shambled to the doorway.

"Want more?" asked the young stranger levelly.

Bill—Mr. William Buldo—made no reply. His own second-in-command, he noted with a bloodshot eye, was bringing Jack Foster a dipperful of water—he'd deal with that guy presently. Meantime, without speaking, Bill unbuttoned his vari-colored shirt, took it off, and tightened his waist-belt.

Head down, after the manner of an angry bull, yet with the deliberation of a diamond-back about to strike a bird, he surveyed his adversary from head to foot and back again. Hundred and sixty pounds, and light in the hips. He himself weighed two-ten, and had the mid-section of an ox. The thing to do would be to fall on the guy and hammer him in the stomach. Might finish up with a good one under the belt, or the old knee trick. Anyhow, the first thing was to get him rattled—start on him unawares. Like this!

Only it wasn't like that. Jack Foster was still drinking from the dipper when the charge commenced; but over the rim of it his eyes—those peculiar eyes at which people glanced twice, and then returned thanks that their possessor wasn't mad at them personally—were watchful and intent. So that Mr. Buldo, coming forward with head down and fists milling, found himself

subjected to most cruel and unusual treatment.

In the first place, just as he was about to swing two blind but crushing blows inward to his adversary's ribs, a hard and bony knee flew up and seemed to drive his whole face in. Then, as he raised his head, a fist took him in the right eye. It was already blinded with tears; it would soon, Mr. Buldo felt in his bones, be additionally obscured by swelling. And, even as he thought of this, and while yet he pawed the air in search of the cause of things, his left eye likewise collided with something hard and fast-moving. From out of the swimming darkness he heard a voice.

"I'd fight fair, if I were you," said Jack Foster gravely, "because if you don't you'll get hurt. Badly."

The tears flooding Mr. Buldo's eyes overbrimmed and ran down his face. He could see now, though a puffiness of his lids warned him that this blessing would be of short duration. He would have to smash this youngster quick. One punch'd do it—and then what was to prevent a guy from tripping and falling on him, with an elbow in his solar plexus?

"What do you want? Rough an' tumble, or Queensberry rules?" the newcomer snapped.

"Rough—" began Bill Buldo savagely; and then noted how the young man was holding his hands. That meant jujutsu, or some such stuff—breaking bones. "I mean, Queensberry."

"Happy to oblige. Ready?"

MR. BULDO had had enough of charges, fair or foul. Cautiously, his hands up and his chin down, he began to circle his opponent, looking for an opening for that one

blow. Only one—and certainly the fist that had been known to stun a steer, could do at least as much for this young squirt.

But the opening didn't seem to come. Wherever Mr. Buldo was, there also was Jack Foster facing; his left hand, with its grazed knuckles, moving pistonwise to and fro; and his feet in their high-heeled boots performing little dance-steps. It further dawned upon the foreman that while the younger man was merely pivoting on his base, he, Mr. Buldo, was walking yards in a circular path.

"Why don't you come in an'—" he began tauntingly; and at once felt a universe hit his nose.

"Happy to oblige," said Foster mockingly from a distance.

At which Mr. Buldo went, to all intents and purposes; mad.

He could take punishment—or if he couldn't, he didn't care; he was going to smash this kid, smash him to bits, kill him. As he charged in, a straight left swung his head, and a right cut a deep gash in his cheekbone; he hardly felt the blows; his was the berserk fury of a maddened animal. His fist hit something—again—again; he swung his left in a wide arc and felt it connect with flesh and bone.

His eyes were closing fast; but, through the slits remaining, he could see that this last punch had sent his adversary to his knees. Struggling to get up, was he? And he *was* up, in spite of a punch that should have caught him on the jaw while he was still kneeling, should have pretty near broken his neck.

Buldo pivoted slowly on his heels. There he was again, dancing about with his face all bloody. Well, this time—

He charged forward with amazing

suddenness and speed; but, quick as he was, Jack Foster, warned by experience, was quicker. At the last moment, when one of the foreman's blind, terrible swings was an inch from his cheekbone, he stepped aside and back; retracted his right arm, and, as Buldo rushed past him, put his whole weight into an uppercut to the point.

The big man flung up his hands, staggered, fell, rolled over twice, and lay still.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD EAGLE.

"PICK him up," said a stern voice. Another actor had come upon the scene; and evidently, from his tone, one who considered himself not without pretensions to the rôle of star. Turning, Jack Foster found behind him a tall man, possibly sixty years of age; dressed in a rusty black which seemed marvelously out of place in that climate, and among the punchers in their fantastic undress. The newcomer wore, moreover, a vast black wideawake hat; from under whose brim gray eyes, set in a long, lean face, gazed sternly on the scene before them.

"Yessir, boss. Yes, Mr. Holton."

"And you," asked the ranch owner, turning his eyes on Foster, "what's your business here?"

For a moment, while he regained his breath, Jack examined his questioner. A queer sort of old duck, all right—or rather, a queer sort of old eagle; this was one of the last of men to be likened to any barnyard fowl.

From between the gray eyes jutted a thin nose, aggressively curved; below which ran a thin line of lips which would have looked dangerous but for

the droop at their corners. As it was, the stern ensemble of Matthias Holton was spoiled by his mouth. Otherwise of appearance as grim and stern as any old Puritan on a calendar, he seemed, when his lips were considered, rather pathetic.

With that key in hand, one looked once more at those piercing eyes, and discovered that they held quite another look than that first-noticed expression of stern command; behind it, they were sad.

"I came here looking for work," said Foster jerkily.

"Well?"

"Well, I don't know whether that's the kind of manners you use at this ranch, but when I told this guy about it, and asked for a drink of water, he started to ride me. Kept me standing out here in the sun, without so much as an invitation to step into the bunk house, and amused himself kiddin' me."

From the center of the group which was endeavoring to raise Bill Buldo came a dazed growl of protest.

"I can get up alone," said the fallen foreman. "Get to blazes away from me, all of you."

He staggered to his feet and stared around him. His eyes met those of Mr. Holton and widened with surprise; then dropped to the sand at his feet.

"Is this true, Buldo?"

"Is what true, boss?"

"Is it true that this young man came here looking for work, and that you kept him standing outside in the sun while you mocked at him?"

Buldo raised his head for a moment, and looked at Jack Foster. There was murder in that look; and scarcely less in the glance which flickered to the ranch owner.

"Did he tell you that?"

"Never mind who told me. I'm asking you if it's true."

There was no answer.

"Then I assume it is. Now, I'll tell you, Buldo; you've been warned before. You've chased some of the best young men off this ranch with your infernal bullying, and I've told you it would have to stop. You've met your Waterloo this time, and I'm glad of it; but that doesn't alter the case as far as I'm concerned. You can get into that bunk house and get your duffel and get out of here—by to-night. You're fired."

BULDO'S head came up again.

"Fired, am I?" he demanded, his muscles tightening.

Matthias Holton flicked a hand at his waistcoat. It was a long, thin, aristocratic hand, and a flowered waistcoat belonging to the same period as the frock coat and the wideawake hat. And now, for the delectation of Mr. Buldo, there appeared another relic of the '80's—a double-barrelled forty-one derringer, which stared out of its two cold, black eyes at his stomach.

"Are you intending," inquired Mr. Holton, "to dispute it?"

Buldo said nothing.

"I might as well tell you now," said the ranch owner sternly, "that I'm onto you, Buldo, and have been for some time. You've been taking my money, and eating my food, and all the time you've been playing booty with the gang that wants this ranch. Don't lie to me now! I know it. You've been taking my pay as foreman, and for the last two months you've been trying to run the ranch down so that I'd sell it the way they want me to. I've been waiting for you to do something you could go to jail for; but never mind that. Get out of here, you

dog; the next meeting of the ranch owners' association will see you posted all over Texas; and if ever I see you on my land again, I'll shoot you down like vermin. Understand?"

Once again Buldo raised his head, looked at his late employer, and nodded.

Jack Foster, watching that look, felt a shiver traverse his spine.

"See him off the place, men," said Matthias Holton to the open-mouthed punchers. "And you, young man, come with me."

Quite unmoved by the scene he was quitting, slipping his derringer back into his pocket with the unconcern of a man who has casually taken out his watch to see the time, the old man turned his back upon Buldo, and led the way, up the veranda steps, across the porch, and into the living room of the ranch house.

It was a peculiar room; neat, clean, and orderly, yet conveying a strange impression of neglect. Skins covered the floor; a magnificent bison head formed the center piece of walls covered with trophies; and in one corner stood a case containing a dozen or more rifles of various makes and calibers.

For the rest, the room was furnished with big leather saddlebag chairs, their arms and backs showing that comfortable lack of alignment which comes with long use; and in its center stood a huge desk-table, strewn with papers. Matthias Holton placed himself behind this barricade; and, before seating himself, spoke to Foster:

"I should not like you to think, sir, that the treatment to which you have been subjected is the standard of hospitality at the WH. Possibly it may be explained to some extent by what you have just heard, much as I regret that

your arrival should have introduced you to my personal troubles. I trust that you will accept this expression of my regret. Fung Ah Lo!"

A Chinese servant appeared.

"I believe, sir, that you mentioned a thirst," said Mr. Holton. "My cellar is not what it was, but if you will nominate—"

"Water'll do me," said Jack Foster. "Thanks all the same."

"I am of your opinion. Two large glasses of water, Lo."

Hissing politely, the Chinese retired.

"SMOKE, sir?"

Foster accepted a long, black cigar; lit it from a match ceremoniously tendered, and drew a luxurious puff.

"I feel kind of guilty!" he began.

"Certainly not, my dear sir. The man was—"

"I don't mean that. But—well, I'm here sitting in your living room as if I were another rancher, yet what I really came around for was a job."

"I was aware of the fact," said Mr. Holton, bowing. "But at the same time, sir, I am unaware of any reason why two gentlemen should not associate for the purpose of conversation regardless of the fact that one of them may shortly be in the employ of the other one."

"The promotion of one of the other men to take the place of that rascal Buldo will naturally leave a place open, which I shall be very pleased to have you take if you care to. While we are on this subject, however, I may tell you that the situation has drawbacks. Er—drawbacks."

The Chinese entered, put down his tray, and retired.

"I drink," said Mr. Holton, "though but in water, to your health,

sir. You do not ask what the drawbacks are?"

"I figured that if you wanted to tell me, you would. Otherwise," said the Arizona man, raising the ice-tinkling glass to his lips, "I reckoned that I should find out soon enough. Your health, sir, and prosperity."

"I thank you. But to tell the truth, that—prosperity—is just one of the drawbacks to which I referred. Briefly, I am not quite sure how long I shall be conducting this ranch. There has been oil-drilling—a dirty business—near here. It has been unsuccessful, but it has ruined several of the springs supplying my neighbors' ranches. Mine, I am glad to say, have remained unharmed, which is some poor consolation for having tried to stick to the traditions of a Southern gentleman, sir, in a more or less troubled world. A syndicate, which has already bought in these waterless ranches dirt cheap, now wishes to acquire my land, so that my water may also serve them—or possibly to drill for oil; they will give no guarantee as to that. In any case, neither the price nor the parties involved are satisfactory to me. This land has been in my family ever since there was any Texas, sir, and I will not sell it!"

There was no sadness to be seen in the old gentleman's eyes now. They blazed, and he struck the table heavily with his palm. Jack Foster nodded gravely.

"Until recently," Mr. Holton continued, "negotiations, though vain, have been fair and aboveboard. Now, as you heard, I have reason to believe that certain parties have resolved to gain possession of my land, by foul means if necessary. What means may be used, I do not know. I mention this to warn you that other duties may be

required of my assistants than—er—plain cow-punching.”

“VERY glad to undertake ’em,” said Foster cheerily. His eyes met those of the old man across the table; and both smiled. “Didn’t you say there were more drawbacks than one?”

With an agitation in strange contrast with his former calm dignity, Mr. Holton rose.

“I don’t know—” he began, and stopped. His pale cheeks were suffused by a light flush. With short, nervous steps he commenced to pace up and down behind his table.

“Sorry,” said Jack Foster, putting down his glass. “Never mind, sir.”

“It is nothing,” said the old man. “You would certainly hear of the matter out there in the bunk house; I prefer to tell you myself. The matter concerns you very slightly, save insofar as you are a young man. I am a widower, sir; these many years; but I had a daughter. That daughter left my roof and care under circumstances—circumstances which I did not approve. She is now dead to me, and I will not have her mentioned. Nor any other woman.”

“That,” said Foster softly, “is no drawback so far’s I’m concerned. Fact is, that’s why I came here; and it’s a long way from where I was workin’.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Why, if you don’t mind my sayin’ so, this ranch is pretty well known for that—I don’t mean about Miss Holton, but the other. They say WH stands for Woman Hater, you know.”

“It stands for Walter Holton, sir—my father’s name and my grandfather’s!”

“Well, anyhow,” said the young man, rising, “that’s why I came here.”

The old man gazed at him sadly.

“Have you, too, had—experiences?” he inquired.

Jack Foster’s face broke into a most surprising wry smile; a very different affair from his usual cheery grin.

“I don’t know whether you’d call ’em that, sir,” said he. “Only had one, but that was enough. Girl I was engaged to waved me off to the war, an’ while I was fightin’ it she went an’ married a fat guy that dodged the draft so he could manufacture munitions. He married her so’s he could stay out till he got his factory goin’.”

The two men’s eyes met and held for some seconds; then, silently, Matthias Holton put forth his right hand. With his left, and with a movement so quick as to be hardly perceptible, he brushed his eyes.

“We’re well rid of ’em, my boy,” he said hoarsely. “Now—we’ll go out an’ see the new foreman.”

CHAPTER III.

AT THE SPRING.

THE new foreman, it seemed, was none other than the possessor of that mild voice which, on Jack Foster’s arrival, had vainly counseled Bill Buldo to act decently; a short, slim man of perhaps fifty, with grizzled hair and eyes that twinkled in a lined brown face. He hailed, as he informed the newcomer that evening in the bunk house, from Idaho; and his hobby was playing the ocarina in a manner which must have made both the composer of the music and the inventor of that instrument turn in their graves and call his name—Jedediah Wilks—most horribly unblest.

“I reckon,” he said to Foster the next morning, when the punchers as-

signed to various duties had saddled and ridden away, "that I won't put you on reg'lar work to-day, John. There's chores to be fixed up around here enough for this morning, an' while we do 'em, I can kinda put you on to the ways of the outfit. Then this afternoon when it gets cool, we might take a ride around an' you get your bearin's, while I see what that pale pink reptile of a Buldo left undone."

Another scorching day had descended upon the WH. Noon found the sky a domed circle of eye-searing white, centered on a sun of unendurable brightness; and mid afternoon, when usually, the semblance of a breeze would blow from the river, saw little diminution of the heat.

It was half past four before Jedediah felt impelled to give the signal for departure on his tour of inspection; and then an hour elapsed before he could induce his horse to take the same view of matters as he did himself.

There were docile ponies enough in the corral, including the string assigned to Wilks himself; but for light personal use the new foreman would have none of them. He owned his own mare—a gray-forelocked roan in its second mustanghood. The mare, in all things but ocarina-playing and number of legs, bore an almost startling resemblance to himself.

"You wouldn't think," gasped Jedediah to Jack Foster, after some fifty vain throws of the rope, "that I'd raised that ar animile from a colt, now, would you? Cotched her wild, I did, and brought her up the way I wish somebody'd brought me up when I was her age. Laura, you gonna come here, you hunk of perdition?"

The gray-haired mare tossed her head, and regarded her master with a twinkling eye.

"Fifteen years I've fed that horse everything from beans to bran-mash," complained Wilks, "an' never touched her with a spur or put a bit into her mouth that wasn't warmed, an' now—Well, I guess that's what we got to expect. I'll take another horse."

"Let me try a throw," said Foster.

"Ssh. This is the way to get her."

And indeed, before Jedediah had moved more than a dozen paces toward his substitute pony, the old horse was at his side. With a quick flirt of her nose, she pushed her master back, and with a heave of her shoulder sent the rival staggering sidewise against the corral railing. Then, with a white-rimmed eye rolling in search of reprisals from that quarter, she put her neck over Wilks's shoulder and whinnied.

"I should think so," said the foreman, affectionately boxing her nose. "See that, John? Knows every word I say. Regular stunt of hers, this is; an' she can kick the ribs out of any horse that I want to ride, except when it's business. She knows she's past ropin' work an' such-like. But you better mind your manners, old girl. I'm foreman now. Any freshness out of you, an' folks'll be usin' your hoofs to seal envelopes. Ready, John? Then gimme a hand with this cinch. Jevver see a horse with such a belly in your life?"

THEY rode forth; the men smiling, the coquettish Laura footing her way delicately over the brown-burned grass.

"Guess you think I'm kind of foolish," said Jedediah; as, at the top of a sharp rise of ground, he paused to let the mare rest.

"Uh-uh. No."

"Way it is with me," said Wilks,

"the old girl's been kind of all I had since—since I was left alone." Wilks, shaking out his bridle, made an unnoticed grimace. "I had—pretty good luck when I was a young feller. But I lost her an' two kids in a railway smash. Mr. Holton been talkin' to you? Over there's the tank for the house water supply. Feeds from the stream."

"Yes," said Jack Foster, "he said something—Do you know about it?"

"Reckon I do. I was here when it happened. Darn old fool. Don't like to see you goin' the same way."

"I'm not going," said Jack Foster with a short laugh. "I'm gone."

"Yeah? And for about as good reason as the old man had, I'll bet you. Listen: I work here, an' I obey the rules, but you can't fool me. This woman-hater stuff never got a guy anywhere yet. In the first place, there ain't anythin' to hate women for—I got a kind of idea that the worst of 'em's as good as most men; secondly, you can't do it, even if you kid yourself you can; and lastly, any try you make at it hurts you more'n it does them. Think the boss fools me, goin' around actin' tough an' eatin' his heart out all the time? You can't do it, kid. It don't work. Over there is what we call Two-Mile Copse—that bunch of trees yonder by the rise of ground."

Foster, his lips set in a thin line, stared straight ahead. Wilks stole a sidelong glance at him.

"It ain't every father gets a girl like Miss Alice," he said, "or keeps her when he's got her. I didn't. An' that old fool—yeah, he's my boss, an' I call him that—raised her to nineteen or twenty, an' turned her out of his house. An' what for?"

Apparently the subject jarred on Jack Foster.

"How should I know?" he demanded irritably.

"I'll tell you. It was because the kid was bored down here on this ranch, with nobody to talk to that was her own age—nothin' to do but keep house for her pa, an' a Chink to take even that out of her hands. This ain't Civil War times—she wanted to do something in the world. Teach school, as a matter of fact, an' she could have been teachin' it right now—over in Hurst City, an' comin' home every night—if her pa'd been anyways reasonable. But he wasn't. What did he care for her wants? What did he know about 'em, come to that? He knew what girls liked in his time, an' that's what he figured on givin' her, whether she wanted it or not. She could have new clothes if she wanted—he had a dress-maker put ruffles on 'em, nigh down to the floor, can you imagine it? An' she could have as many ponies as she cared for, providin' she'd ride 'em side-saddle. But teachin' in school wasn't for no daughter of no Southern gentleman. An' I'm tellin' you, that quiet as he looks, the old man's got a temper. An' so had Alice. My stars an' stripes, what rows they used to have!"

"And finally," said Jack Foster, "she left her old father alone on the ranch where he'd brought her up an' tried to do his best for her, and went off an' pleased herself anyhow, eh?"

WILKS nodded.

"Bein' of the age of twenty-one," he said mildly, "an' a free human bein' in her own right, same's her pa, if you know what I mean, she acted as such. Guess she may've been readin' the Constitution or somep'n; you know, where it says there ain't to be no slavery, and don't make exception in favor of parents."

"Fine slavery!"

"W-e-ell," said Wilks, "you might like it yourself, to be loaded with luxuries you didn't want, and forbidden the only thing you did. You might be right grateful to the party doin' it, an' figure you was as free as air. I shouldn't. Though she was grateful, at that. She spent nigh all one afternoon cryin', and beggin' her pa to be reasonable, or at least to let 'em part friends; but he couldn't see it that way. So she's teachin' school somewhere up-State, instead of just down there at Hurst City; an' instead of seein' her every evenin', he's tearin' up her letters unread—an' dyin' of it. Well, now we're at the heart of the property, almost. Just over this rise. Did the boss tell you about our water rights?"

"Yes." Something seemed to have toned down the bitterness formerly audible in Jack Foster's voice, and to have distracted his mind from the business of the WH.

"If I know anything," said Wilks, as the horses topped the knoll, "there'll be trouble over that water yet, an' bad—Who's down there by the spring?"

Below them, in the gracious little valley, whose greener grass showed the effect of proximity to moisture, lay the water supply of the WH. A small pool, fed by the underground spring, in turn fed a brook some four or five feet wide. This wandered away to the west as the first stage of its ten-mile run to the Rio Grande. It was not yet time for the cattle to come down for their evening drink; and at first glance, even after the foreman had spoken, Foster thought the valley entirely deserted. After a moment, however, he perceived that he was wrong. Two men, holding some long, dark object between them, were kneeling by the pool;

their horses were tethered; almost out of sight, in a shadow of a clump of trees.

As he looked, the two men swung their burden and launched it far into the water.

"What 're they up to?" he began; but there was no puzzlement on the face of Jedediah Wilks. In the failing light of the coming dusk, it showed gray with rage; and, as he drew a revolver from his right-hand holster, he was swearing in a tone very different from his usual mild manner.

"Get after them!" snarled Jedediah, breaking his record as regarded spurring Laura. The frightened mare, apparently cured both of flirtatiousness and old age, leaped forward down the slope, her ears back, her fat barrel swaying valiantly under the drive of her aged hind legs; and in a moment, Foster's horse was following her.

THE men down by the pond, absorbed in watching the sinking of the object they had thrown, were three hundred yards away—two hundred and fifty—two hundred—before they heard the drumming of hoofs on the soft turf. Then they turned; made the instinctive motion of Westerners surprised—a grab for their gun-belts; thought better of it, and ran incontinently for their horses.

Jedediah Wilks, swearing like a trooper, and without the slightest regard for the limitations of modern firearms, emptied his revolver at them; of course, without result. They were around the end of the pond—they had their mounts—they were up in the saddle; and while yet the two WH men were a hundred and fifty yards away, they were spurring furiously up the valley's opposite slope.

"After them!" gasped Mr. Wilks.

But it was of no use. The fugitives, whoever they were, had fresh horses; Jack Foster's was still tired from the long, hot ride of the day before, and Laura, brave as she was, began to roar in her throat at the very beginning of the ascent. Nevertheless, she carried on, pounding gallantly forward, still a pace or two in advance of Jack's pony, until the crest of the rise was gained.

There, scarce a hundred yards away in the gathering dusk, was the quarry—halted. One of the pursued was raising something to his shoulder. He kept it there for a second, and then it gave forth a minute blue flash. As the report of a rifle came sharply through the evening, old Laura stumbled, crossed her legs, and fell sidewise. In another instant Jack Foster felt his pony stumble; felt himself flying through the air; saw the earth rushing upward at him—and—woke up.

The obscurity had deepened, it seemed, since he had heard that shot fired, and had seen Laura fall under the feet of his horse. There were stars in the sky; and somehow or other he had accumulated a blinding headache. Raising his head, he could see, rather swimmingly, the carcass of Wilks's horse, lying on its side some yards away from him; and—what was that other object that looked rather like a man, kneeling by the old mare's side?

"Wilks!" he called hoarsely.

The kneeling figure had been Jedediah. It arose and came hastily toward him.

"Thank God!" said the foreman. "I couldn't stay with you at first—had to go down to that pool. Brought water back in my hat, a dozen trips, but you wouldn't move. I—I figured you were dead, too. I—finished Laura."

"What was it?"

The incipient tremble in the foreman's voice changed to a blare of fury.

"Them murderin' skunks!" he shouted, shaking his gnarled fist into the dusk. "I'll have their lives for this! Listen: I went down there an' I stripped, an' I went into the pool—it ain't very deep. Do you know what it was they'd thrown in? Come an' look!"

His head throbbing, Jack arose, and walked over to a shapeless object which lay on the grass some yards away. He turned it with his foot. It appeared to be a burlap bag; heavy with some doughlike, soggy contents.

"Arsenic!" said Jedediah Wilks. "White arsenic, fixed so it'd dissolve slowly an' poison the pool an' the whole stream. There's pounds of it there, pounds an' pounds; enough to have killed off half our stock by morning. When I get my hands on whoever—"

HIS bodily ills forgotten in the contemplation of this horror, Jack Foster stared at the older man.

"But who—" he began.

"I know who!" cried Wilks. "This is that syndicate that wants to drill oil wells on the ranch, and wants us off it. I knew somethin' like this would happen. This ain't the end. Listen, Jack. We've got to set a guard over this pool an' the whole water-course now; to-night. Your horse ain't hurt. You ride back to the house, hell for leather, an' get me half a dozen of the best men. Tell the others to be ready to relieve them in the morning—it must be nine o'clock now; they'll relieve at nine to-morrow. Get Wilson, an' Jones an'—I can't think of names now, but pick out the guys that look best for to-night. Those birds may come back."

"What about you?"

"I'm gonna stay here," said the foreman, his eyes wandering to the body of his horse, "till you get back with the guard."

"If they do come back, an' find you alone—"

"There'll be one of 'em dead before I am!" roared Jedediah. "Now, on your way, son. An' don't stop off to play marbles."

There was no lack of spurs—albeit blunt ones—on the way home. The night wind had risen, and Jack's pony, breasting rise after rise on his gallop to the ranch house, raised his head to the cooler air, and increased his speed. Two-Mile Copse flashed by, silvery in the light of the risen moon; ahead loomed the tank pointed out by old Jedediah—the tank which, but for accident, would by morning have contained its share of poison, for distribution to the humans of the ranch. Now it was behind, and the lights of the ranch house were visible.

There was singing in the bunk house, and somebody was essaying to extract jazz from Wilks's ocarina. Jack Foster passed by unsmiling and, wrenching his horse around in a half circle toward the house veranda, vaulted over the railing and walked without knocking into the living-room.

"Mr. Holton!" he cried.

The master of the WH was seated in his chair, a newspaper in his hands; his head bowed forward on his bosom. He appeared to be asleep; his glass at his elbow, a cigar still smoldering in the ash-tray at his right hand.

"Mr. Holton!"

There was no time to be lost. Stepping forward, Jack laid his hand on his boss's shoulder and shook him. The paper, loosed by nerveless hands, fluttered to the floor; but the old man

did not open his eyes. A faint groan seemed to come from his lips; that was all.

"Mr. Holton! Are you ill?"

The eyelids fluttered faintly, and one hand made a purposeless motion toward the breast. There was a bell on the great table; Foster seized it and, horrified eyes fixed on his employer, rang it violently.

A scared-looking Chinaman appeared, half undressed.

"Your master's taken sick," snapped Foster. "Help me get him on the couch, there, and fetch brandy. Hurry! Take his legs."

THEY laid the old man on the sofa under the west windows, and the servant, his felt soles scuffling with earnestness, left the room. The ranch owner's eyes were closed; he lay quite still, save for the slight movement of his chest under its old-fashioned coat. The breathing seemed laborious and slow. Once the waiting puncher thought it had stopped entirely; but, as he was leaning forward to feel the dangling wrist, he heard it recommence. And with it, came words. Faint, weak, scarcely audible; but words.

"My girl!" said Matthias Holton as from the dead. "Who is this?"

"It's Jack Foster, Mr. Holton, the man you hired yesterday."

"Look after her."

"I will."

"Swear it." The voice grew stronger, and for an instant the heavy-lidded eyes opened. "Swear it! Swear to look after—my girl."

"I do swear it, Mr. Holton. I swear it on my honor, that I'll do anything I can for her."

The eyes closed.

"Mistake," said the voice, growing

fainter. "I—mistake—good girl—tell her—"

And that was the end of Matthias Holton as an inhabitant of this troubled sphere. Fung Ah Lo was at hand, with the now useless brandy; and, as Jack Foster rose and stepped away from the couch, he broke into a stream of agitated Chinese.

"You be quiet," said the white man.

But Fung Ah Lo was not expressing grief. Wildly, with outstretched finger, he was calling attention to one of the windows of the living-room—the wide window near the chair in which Matthias Holton had been sitting; to a pane in the center of the lower sash. There was a small hole in the pane—a hole about one-third of an inch across, its edges frosted as with

snow, and surrounded by radiating cracks.

A bullet hole!

His hair bristling on his head, Jack Foster stepped back to the couch.

There, just over the breast pocket of Mr. Holton's old frockcoat—invisible save to one who knew what to seek—was a tiny tear; and under it, the white shirt showed a little ring of black. And below that again were the great veins leading to the heart; shot through which, a man bleeds quietly, internally—and fatally, without hope.

The puncher straightened himself; his eyes, staring out of a face suddenly gone pale, met those of the trembling servant.

"Murdered!" he cried. "Murdered!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The Bridge of Stores

"THE BRIDGE OF STORES" is situated on the single long street which contains the Chinese and secondhand shops of Bangkok, Siam. A door in the wall barely wide enough to admit a ricksha takes the visitor into the street, where he may buy anything from zircons and rubies to beeswax temple candles, wooden shavings and "madura" diamonds. Fruit-flavored ice is shaved off and sold for a copper coin. Women squat on benches pulling flowers apart and sewing the petals together again in a dozen different designs. They take wild roses and sew the petals together to look like dahlias.

"Madura diamonds" are zircons, a relatively cheap gem stone that is often colored pink, brown, yellow or blue. The color is heated and roasted out of the stone to leave it clear and white and transparent, and a fancy cutting will then enable some betel-chewing shopkeeper to sell it as a diamond to some unsuspecting tourist.

Halfway down the street a bridge crosses the river, both sides of the bridge so crowded with stores that the river cannot be seen except through a back window. The Bridge of Stores sells anything from monkey wrenches to silk hosiery, canned salmon and American soap.

Wyman Sidney Smith.

"Draw a Gun!"

By W. WIRT

Author of "'What Kept You?'"
"Swords Are Out!" etc.



Cut off one of the Hydra's heads, and two more come in its place—but Detroit's underworld didn't know the Federal secret service is even more deadly than the Hydra

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE SPOT.

THE barroom of Fat Cardill's road house, ten miles out of Detroit, was crowded. Two heavy shipments had come across the line and been delivered. Some of the boys had taken the opportunity to bring a few profitable little yellow brothers over at the same time.

Now, at three o'clock in the morning, the crap game in the corner was running with the saddle and bridle off. Two or three stud poker games were in full swing, with the limit the bright North Star. Three bartenders and five or six waiters were trying to keep the crowd supplied with drinks.

It was a hard bunch to handle, all gangsters, and all with money. Fat Cardill was out on the floor himself, with two of his white-faced, cold-eyed

gamblers. He was as busy as his three bartenders.

The five men at one of the poker tables looked up as the room suddenly became still. Three men had come in through the side door. The one that stood a little in front of the other two was a stockily-built Slav, immaculately dressed.

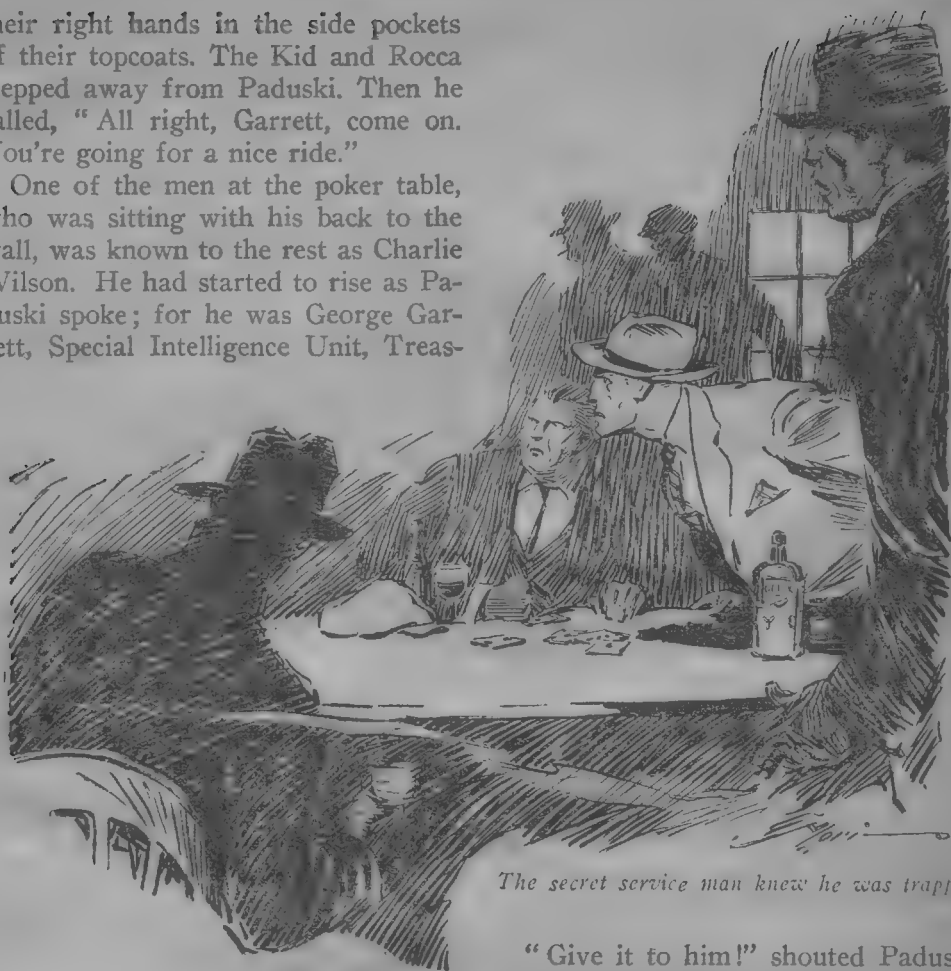
He was Ed Paduski, rum and dope runner and Chinese smuggler. Most of the men in the room worked for him or with interlocking gangs. The two men with him were two of his gunners, a young Italian named Rocca and a man called the Chi Kid.

"Somebody is going to get put on the spot," said one of the men at the poker table, softly.

Paduski looked around the room; then, as his eyes took in the men sitting at the poker table, he said something to the two with him. All three had

their right hands in the side pockets of their topcoats. The Kid and Rocca stepped away from Paduski. Then he called, "All right, Garrett, come on. You're going for a nice ride."

One of the men at the poker table, who was sitting with his back to the wall, was known to the rest as Charlie Wilson. He had started to rise as Paduski spoke; for he was George Garrett, Special Intelligence Unit, Treas-



The secret service man knew he was trapped

ury Department; and the second that his eyes had met Paduski's he knew he was uncovered. As he rose, he kicked the chair away from him and drew his Colt forty-five. The other four men at the table were under it or crouched on the floor before his chair had hit the wall.

ROCCA and the Chi Kid stepped in front of Paduski, as they were paid to do, and the automatics came out of their pockets.

Garrett laughed and backed to the wall. "Come and get me for a ride, Wop!" he called.

"Give it to him!" shouted Paduski from between the shoulders of his bodyguard.

Both Rocca and the Chi Kid opened fire, but the shot that killed George Garrett came from the top of the landing, where the stairs were. Ed Paduski took no chances, unless he had to. As Garrett fell face first across the table, his Colt detonated, but the bullet dug its way into the floor.

All over the room men stood as if frozen, some with glasses half raised to their lips. Paduski stepped in front. Again, a sneer on his full lips. "That's all," he said. "That bird was George Garrett, a Treasury under-cover man from Washington. I wanted to show

you damn Tommy-busters what happens to 'em when they go up against a real guy. Any of you knucks that get an idea of ratting, figure how I got that dope and how easy I can get any other kind. Fat, take that cold meat out and plant it somewhere." He stopped talking and looked once more around the room, then to an old man who was standing at one end of the bar, shivering as if with the ague: "Come on, Pop."

"Oh, for God's sake, don't!" almost yelled the old man, "I didn't know he was a dick; I swear I didn't. Don't take me for no ride, Ed! It ain't my fault. I—"

Paduski laughed, as did Rocca and the Chi Kid. "We ain't going to take you for a ride, Pop," he said. "There's a swell dame out in the car that wants to meet you."

One of the bartenders came around the bar and ran the struggling old man up to Paduski, a ruthless hand on the scrawny old neck.

"Take him out to the swell dame," ordered Paduski to Rocca. "Wait for me, I'll be out in a minute."

The young Italian, with a smile of real enjoyment on his evil, handsome dark face, dragged the now whimpering old man to the side door and out.

"I just want to say," went on Paduski to the room, "that Pop won't be back. I don't think that he knew this elbow was a government cop; but he brought him in. That makes him responsible. Think that over also, you gorillas."

He turned away. The Chi Kid waited with his face to the room until Paduski stepped into the darkness, then he followed.

Rocca and Pop were sitting in the back seat of Paduski's sedan. "Get

in and help entertain Pop," he ordered, as he took the wheel.

The Chi Kid laughed and got inside with: "Move over, Pop. I'll sit here until the swell dame comes."

The old man had ceased to make any more attempts to escape and his whimpering was still now, but his eyes showed stark fear. He had been a good man in his day, this Pop Nichols, but years in prisons had taken their toll and now he was like a rabbit under the paws of a red fox.

Paduski drove steadily for a few minutes, then turned down a road lined with timber on both sides. He pulled over to the side and after he stopped, turned in his seat.

"**N**OW, Pop," he said softly, "don't look so goofy. Nothing is going to happen to you. I want to get some dope before we take you to the swell dame that lives just up the road. First, the way I got it from Sam Adams, this dick that called himself Charlie Wilson crashed out of Pogie, up in northern New York, and took you along with him. Is that right?"

"Yes," answered Pop quietly. He knew that death was close to him, but while the sneering voice had been going on, some tap of strength had opened for him and he became once more, for a little while, in part the man he used to be.

"I was doin' a valentine when he got thrown in. A couple of the rube John Laws gave him the third, but didn't get anything. They were trying to hang a penny-weightin' job on him."

"I see," said Paduski, smoothly, "then what?"

"He whipped a couple of punks that was picking on me and then he got a ten-spot and—"

"For what?" sneered Rocca. "Whipping the punks that picked on you, Pop?"

"No; for the sparklers they said he went south with. He wouldn't open up about them. Those dicks were damn near crazy. They said if he didn't come across and tell where he hid them, they'd see that he got track thirteen and—"

"Never mind that. Keep out of it, Rocca. We haven't got all night to fool with this windjammer. Tell us the rest and hurry up about it; the dame is waiting for you, remember."

"Why, when he was waiting to go to the Stout House, he told me he was going to take it on the lam. I didn't want to die in that damn dirty jungle, so I asked him to take me along. One of the screws came along one night—"

"What happened after you got out?" demanded Paduski. "Never mind the rest; all that and the crash-in' is boloney."

"He said," went on Pop, dully, "that he had to get over the line. That they'd burn him sure as hell if they caught him now. He said he croaked the screw. He said he had a pal up in Montreal and we made it up there. When we got there he went out and came back with a roll. He said his pal had staked him. We hung around and one day I met Sam Adams. He put us to work up there, after lookin' this feller over, and a month ago we come down with a load. That's all I know about it. Go ahead with the rat-killin', I don't give a damn. By Heaven, I've seen the day when I'd take the three of you and—"

"What rat-killing, Pop?" said Paduski, looking at a wrist watch. "Now that you've told me about it, I see how it happened. You're not to blame. It's past the time for your date. Rocca and

the Chi Kid will show you the house. See you later, Pop."

The old man got out of the car without a protest, Rocca and the Kid with him. "Just up the road, Pop," jeered the Chi Kid.

As he did the old man struck at him, missed and started to run down the road, not up.

Rocca and the Chi Kid drew their guns and as calmly and coldly, as if shooting at a mark, emptied their magazines into the fleeing man's back before he had gone fifteen feet.

"You bums!" snarled Paduski. "How many shots does it take to bump off that old sack of bones? Every rube within a mile will be getting his pants on. Get in here and let's go."

CHAPTER II.

STREET SCENE.

AT eight thirty the same morning, two young men walked down Fuller Street near the waterfront. They were slim, very much tanned, wiry of build; and they walked and carried themselves as if they spent most of their time in the open.

The one nearest the curb reached in his pocket, dug around for a minute, then stopped. "Wait a minute, Billy, I got to get some cigarettes."

They had just passed a cigar store and he turned to go back. As he did, Billy said, "You better get a move on. We've got to meet George in ten minutes."

They both saw the touring car coming down the street, half a block away from them on the same side, and both saw the muzzle of a Thompson sub-machine gun coming up over the side. They were in front of a second-hand

furniture store, and it had four steps leading down into a basement, an iron rail running along the sidewalk about three feet up.

They both went under the rail and down like a couple of prairie dogs going into their holes on seeing the shadow of an owl; and just about as fast. There was need of swiftness, because as their bodies went out of sight below the sidewalk, machine-gun bullets spattered along the edge and more went through the basement windows. They both lit on the hard stone floor with their arms shielding heads and their knees drawn up to break the fall. They came to their feet, crouching low, and backed to the side wall, heavy forty-five Colts out and ready, without a word.

The only way to get at them was to put guns over the edge of the sidewalk or to come around to the steps, and the men in the car knew it. One of them swore viciously, "I told you to go slow, you jackass," he snarled to the driver. "Step on it, you damn toaster!"

THE driver obeyed and the car started. The man with the Thompson still held it, a new clip in. Another man was in the back seat with him, leaning over the side, an automatic in his hand. The street was empty of people walking, but faces were peering out from the doorways and stores.

The car got about fifty feet when the heads and shoulders of both the young men came up like a Siamese twin jack-in-the-box.

Both opened fire on the car. The man with the machine gun let it fall and pitched almost out, his body half on the running board, a forty-five bullet in his brain.

The one with the automatic leaned out and began to shoot.

The man sitting with the driver laughed, the high-pitched laugh of a snowbird. "Hold 'er," he ordered. "I'm going to get those guys if it's the last thing I do." The car stopped and he jumped out, as did a third man from the rear. The driver hesitated a second, then joined him.

The man who had been shooting the automatic couldn't join them. He was lying across the legs of the machine gunner, his head half torn off.

The three men ran toward the stone steps, their automatics sending a sleet of steel ahead of them. The two young men in unison took a step up the stairs and their Colts met the charge.

A snowbird with an automatic is a dangerous proposition at any time, but an automatic is not a target gun, even if the man firing it is steady nerved and a dead shot. To a gangster it is an ideal weapon because he can cut loose with eight shots faster than he could with a revolver, the general idea being to get close to the man he wants to hit, and then hand it all out.

But to go up against a man who is using a forty-five revolver, who is a real shot and unafraid, and who is at a little distance, is not so good, as many a gangster has found out. Also an automatic, if worked too fast, is very apt to jam, as has also been demonstrated.

There was a fast swirl of reports, the heavier detonations of the revolvers blending in with the whiplash crack of the automatics.

The man who had come from the rear seat stopped, spun around like a top, then fell off the sidewalk into the gutter.

As he went down, the driver turned and ran back to the car. The man who

had given the order, a well-dressed man with a hard face, sporting a cauliflower ear and a nose that looked as if it had been broken three or four times, paid no attention. He came on, not so fast now. He had realized that he couldn't do any close shooting and run at the same time.

When within twenty feet, he stopped, fired twice, and as his automatic jammed on him, he was literally lifted off his feet by the force of four soft-nosed lead bullets that tore into his body. Both of his last two shots had reached the mark and the young man called Billy sagged against the wall, blood coming on his shirt front.

The driver had reached the car, started it, and as it took the next corner on two wheels, a police car came around from the corner below. It was loaded down with uniformed officers with riot guns, and with them were two plain-clothes men on the running board. There was a station house within two blocks.

The wounded man saw them coming. "Get out of here, quick! Through the basement!"

"Aw, hell, Billy," protested his partner.

"Get going, Mase; don't—" he stopped, coughing blood.

As the police car came to a brake-burning stop, the man Mase obeyed. He opened the door leading into the basement and ran through.

Two men rose from behind some boxes and started as if to stop him. They jumped back to cover as they saw the muzzle of the Colt swing toward them and recognized death in the wintry smile on the lips of the young man who stopped and faced them. He ran out, across the alley, over a fence and into the areaway of a tumbled-down tenement house. When he

cleared the alley, he holstered his gun under his arm.

THE police jumped from the car. "Get the rat that ran!" shouted a lieutenant. "You, Murphy! Go with him, Adams! Smith, you and Tony chase that car! Go with 'em, Mac. It's a hell of a nice thing to happen in Detroit, ain't it? We'll teach those dirty gangsters to come up here with their damn machine guns!"

No one was paying any attention to him, except the crowd that had gathered. Two officers had run through the basement, the others named had gone with the police car. Two more were driving the crowd back and the two detective sergeants were bending over Billy, who was unconscious.

One of them straightened up. "He's alive. Pull for the ambulance, Tommy." He looked around in horror, hardened as he was. "Two dead in the street, this bird damn near it, another one hanging over the side of the car, and—"

"Not now, he ain't," said his partner. "Look up the street. When they turned the corner he fell out."

Two more police cars came up, one of them with an inspector.

The inspector went over to where the man who had ordered the car to stop lay on his face and turned him over. "Mike O'Neill," he announced. "Who's the lad in the gutter?"

"Angelo Legnano," answered one of the detective sergeants. "I'll be damned, look who's here!" Two men were bringing in the body of the machine gunner to where the rest lay.

"So," said the inspector grimly as he looked down at what was left of the white young face. "'Tis you, is it, me bucko? Got it at last, ain't you?"

"Who is it, inspector?" asked one of the young policemen, very respectfully.

"Jimmie Clark. I've known that lad since he was a baby."

The two officers that had run through the basement came back. "He got away through that dump fronting on Charles Street. These two fellers were in front as he came through and they say he had a car planted there."

"Take 'em into twenty-six," the inspector ordered the lieutenant. "Get his description and have a drag thrown out." Then as the ambulance and more police cars came up, the inspector said: "It may go in Chicago or New York, but they can't pull this kind of stuff in Detroit and get away with it."

CHAPTER III.

THIEVES' HONOR.

THE murder car went down four blocks and turned to the north.

Long before the slower police car made the fourth block, the quarry was out of sight. The driver turned his head long enough to see that the body of the automatic-shooter had slumped down to the bottom of the rear seat. He doubled back, ran through the outskirts of the city at a fair rate of speed, then stepped on it until he pulled in around to the rear of a large frame house ten miles out of town.

He got out and went in the back way without even looking at the body in the back. He went through the kitchen where a man sat peeling potatoes. "Where's Ed?" he asked.

The man looked up. "Hullo, Tommy. What are you doing back so soon?"

"None of your damn business, you

old fool!" said Tommy. "You heard me; where's Paduski?"

"Upstairs with his woman. . . You better not disturb him either. He's on the habit and she's trying to get him off. You needn't get hard with me," the man sniffed, wiping his nose on the sleeve of his dirty white cook's jacket. "If you do, Mike 'll knock you off, you damned gay-rat."

Tommy laughed. "That's good! Listen, you mission stiff, Mike won't knock any one off; he's knocked off himself." He grimaced and started into the hall.

"You're a damn liar," yelled the cook after him.

Tommy didn't answer, but went through to the dance hall, then up the stairs to the upper floor of the old house that had once been a mansion. As he got to the first floor landing, a man sitting on the top step rose.

"Better wait, Tommy, with whatever it is. Listen."

From a room down the hall on the side came a man's voice. "I don't give a damn what you want!" it yelled. "No, I won't—"

Then a woman's voice, cool and unafraid. "Sit down again, Ed. Put that bottle down and behave yourself. You are not going anywhere until you straighten up."

"Man!" whispered Tommy. "She sure has got nerve, that frail. Hell, I got to go in, Tony. Mike O'Neill and Angy Legnano and Jimmie Clark are cold meat, and I got Dave in the car, colder than a wagon tire."

"What?" demanded Tony. "All gone? Sweet daddy, you better lay off with that news. Ed will blow up."

"Aw, it ain't my fault, I was just driving. Mike was givin' the orders. I got to tell him right now. The bulls come up."

"Yeah? That's different; go on in."

When he knocked at the door the woman's voice called, "Who is it?"

Paduski's voice came also. "Get the hell away from that door, whoever it is. Tony, what the devil are you doing, letting any one come here?"

"Easy, Ed," the woman urged, and the door opened.

The woman that opened it was young and pretty in a hard, cold way. Her eyes were set a little too close together and looked a greenish gray. She was a small woman, slender in build. Paduski, standing beside a table, was twice her size. His collar and tie were off and on the floor and the front of his shirt torn open as if he had hard work getting his breath.

As the door closed he yelled: "Well, what is it? Damn it, where is Mike, the big hoister? I told him to—"

"Mike's dead," announced Tommy, standing by the woman. "So are Angy and Dave, Jimmie Clark and—"

THE man laughed. It was not a nice sound. "Why the hell aren't you dead, too? What are you trying to do, kid me, you cheap mack? I'll teach you to come in where I—" His right hand went back of him. As he started to talk the woman slipped across to his side and as his hand came back in front with an automatic, she put her hand on it.

"Give it to me," she demanded calmly, looking up at him. As she spoke she stepped in front of him.

"Like hell!" yelled Paduski. "I'll get rid of this tinker right now!"

"Ed, look at me. Now, give me the rod. Ed, give—me—the—rod."

How great was her influence over him can be figured when the big man, full of cocaine, as dangerous as a copperhead snake, let go the automatic.

"Now, sit down," she commanded. "Here, sit in this chair with me.

"Now, go on, Tommy," said the woman, as Paduski sat down in an overstuffed rocker and she sat on his knee. "Make it short; tell us just what happened."

"I don't know nothin' about it," began Tommy, "except what happened at the knock-off. I got a phone from Mike to get Jimmie Clark and his cannon and to pick them up at Maudie Lamont's place. When I got there Mike and Angy and Dave gets in and Mike tells me to drive down Eighth Street. All of a sudden he says, 'There they are! Let 'em have it, Jimmie,' and he tells me to pull in. I—"

"Sit somewhere else, Rita. I'm all right," said Paduski. Into the drug-inflamed brain had come the knowledge that Tommy was telling him something of importance. As all snowbirds do, Paduski changed in an instant from a raving fool into a clever, extremely clear-brained man. How long it would last was problematical, but for the moment he was back as the master thief, head of and in control of his mob.

"Go on, Tommy," he said quietly.

"All I know is what I'm tellin' you. Mike says pull in and just as I do the two of them turn and jump down into the basement."

The man and the woman sat without another question until Tommy finished his recital with, "I got Dave in the car yet."

"All right, Tommy," said Paduski smoothly. "Go down and tell Whitey and Bull Morgan I said to take care of Dave.

"They're out in back somewhere. You hole up right here until we get the straight of this thing."

"Fair enough," answered Tommy. "How about a few drinks first?"

"Tell Corky I said you could have what you wanted. Better take it with you. Get down in the pit for a little while."

Tommy went out and as he passed the guard, Tony, the woman called, "Come in a minute, Tony."

ON the way down the hall, Tommy had been doing a little quick figuring on his own account. He was the only one left of the carload. Paduski might think it better to have a clean sweep made. That pit thing hadn't sounded good to him at all.

As he reached Tony, he had about made up his mind to keep right on going to a place he knew over the line; and as the woman called the guard, he became sure he was going, as fast as he could—without waiting for any drinks, either.

In which decision he was very wise. He had no sooner closed the door than Paduski said, "First thing to do is to take care of that flying jib. The cops could break him in five minutes. Call Tony."

The woman smiled. "That's the first sign of the old Ed you've shown to-day." She got up and went to the door.

When Tony came in, Paduski said, "Go find Tommy and tell him that I've decided to send him over to Brown's for a little while. Let him lap up a few drinks first, then start over with him. On the way, put him on the spot."

"Sure," answered Tony indifferently, and went out.

Tommy went right through the dance hall, never even looking over toward the bar on the left. One of the bartenders called to him, but he waved

his hand and went on. When he passed through to the kitchen, the cook was standing at the stove.

"Is that true about Mike?"

"Naw, I was only kiddin'," answered Tommy, not stopping. "I got some meat for you, Smithie; come on out and get it."

The fat cook went out to the car with him. "There it is in the back," said Tommy with a grin. "Roast it for dinner, cookee."

"My God!" gasped the blubbery cook, staggering back. "You young hellion!"

"Go on, lift it out," grinned Tommy.

"I—I couldn't touch it. I seen too many of 'em."

"Huh." Tommy pushed him away. "I thought you were a game guy." He took the body by the legs and pulled it out of the car, letting it drop to the ground.

He got in his car, started it and got to the driveway. Just as he did Tony came out. "Wait a minute, Tommy," he called.

"Wait, hell!" whispered Tommy to the wheel as he stepped on the gas. "Not for you, wop." The first bullet from Tony's gun came tearing through the back of the car, and Tommy talked no more to the wheel, but gave all his attention to driving. He knew he had to make a turn farther down the driveway to get on the highway, and he wanted to be as far away from Tony as he could get and also going as fast as he could when he made it.

Tony fired two more shots, then turned and ran to a garage in the rear, from which two other men came running out.

They got into a car and started after Tommy but stopped after getting out on the highway a mile or so. They

knew the car Tommy was driving, and they knew his driving ability. They also knew that, spurred by fear, he could not be caught at the moment.

"I hope," said Tony softly, "that the little rat won't get in the ditch or into a jam. I want to get him myself."

"If he meets anything, and they don't go into the ditch and let him by," answered one of the men, "he'll go sky-high the way he's stepping on it. What was it, Tony?"

"Damn if I know. Ask Ed."

CHAPTER IV.

FEUDIN' COUNTRY.

CAPTAIN JAMES NORCROSS SAUNDERS, Section Chief of Special Intelligence, and formerly of the Military Intelligence in the A. E. F., drove slowly up the narrow road, which was more of a mountain trail than a road, in Breathitt County, Kentucky. He was going up to see Johnny Hatfield, and on the front seat with him was another Hatfield.

The captain was blessed with chilled steel nerves and in most cases would go anywhere at any time alone. But coupled with the nerve he had quite a lot of good sense, and he knew better than to drive up in these hills unless he had some one with him who was well known and also easily recognized from a distance. He had no desire to be found leaning over a wheel with a thirty-thirty bullet in his heart, or with the bullet's exit showing in what was left of the back of his head.

He drove slowly past the gaunt, weather-beaten houses where most of the time there were two or three men lounging in front who had seen or been told about the "car comin' up." They would rise as the car came along and

saunter out on the road. It would be "Howdy, Les. Howdy, Bud," or "Howdy, Hatfield, where you-all aim-in' to get?"

"This here is a right good friend of Johnny's," Hatfield would explain. "I'm takin' him up. Johnny he wrote down and told me to meet him. His name is Jimmie Saunders."

The fact that a Hatfield was with the stranger and that he was being taken to see Johnny was sufficient, and the next thing would be an invitation to "stay a spell." They made the spells as short as possible, and Jimmie finally arrived and was introduced. He was looked over by eight or ten of the Hatfields and Howards and Picketts who were always more or less near the big rambling old place of Pappy Hatfield. After eating, Saunders walked down to a bench alongside of a spring with Johnny Hatfield.

"Johnny," he said to the lean-browed, black-eyed man of about thirty, who had greeted him with a grin and an outstretched hand. "I'm in a jam, and a damn bad one. I know you're out of the service, but I couldn't think of another man that I'd take a chance on. I got plenty of men fussing around, and some of 'em good ones. But this is something that needs the old-timers."

Johnny Hatfield grinned, and picked up a pretty little six-year-old girl that had come running up to him, her little arms held out with, "Uncle Johnny, I reckon you better hold me tight. Bud and Wes are Injuns and they're after me."

"We'll Injun 'em," Johnny said, nuzzling her plump little neck with his nose. "I'm old Leatherstocking, the Injun killer. They won't come around here, I bet you, Betty Ann. You sit still and peek out under my arm."

Captain Saunders smiled as he heard the slow, soft, caressing drawl, and saw the light in the eyes of Johnny Hatfield, the fastest and hardest special agent he had ever known. He had seen Johnny in action, with a smoking Colt .45, a different Johnny than this one smiling down on the upturned face of a little girl. A Johnny with a frozen little smile, with eyes as cold and wintry as northern water among the icebergs.

Johnny looked over the golden head. "Well, suh, if I can help you out, I'll be right glad to do it, captain."

"YOU can, Johnny. Here it is: About three months ago I sent Charley Allen and Bill Potter up to Detroit on what I thought was just one of those things. There are two gangs up there I want, both tying in with some of the customhouse and prohibition outfits, also a few police and what not. They're pretty tightly organized, but I thought I could horn in eventually, same as I have done before. Charley Allen's body was found on a wharf, full of lead; and Potter was picked up in the river, his head almost beaten off."

"That's mighty sad news to me," answered Johnny slowly. "I fussed around quite a lot with those boys." The smile was gone.

"What's sad, Uncle Johnny?" demanded the little girl straightening around in his arms, then to Captain Saunders. "Are you makin' my Uncle Johnny feel bad? Reckon you better not. I'll smack you in about a minute." She meant it, as the fighting spirit of the Hatfields of Kentucky in her eyes showed plainly.

"Honey, you're a right nice girl and I love you like the dickens. It's only something he's tellin' me, sugar."

"All right, then. I reckon I better go and find Wes and Bud. Maybe they've stopped playin'," and the little girl wriggled down from Johnny's lap. "You stay right here, Uncle Johnny. If they haven't, I'll come back for you to po—potect me."

"And then," Saunders went on, his eyes on the little girl who was edging around the corner of the spring house with an exaggerated air of extreme caution, "I sent Roper up, and arranged a plant to get George Garrett on the inside. Roper was killed by a hop-head as he stepped out of his hotel, the second morning after he got there. Two weeks ago George Garrett was found alongside a country road with a bullet in his brain. He'd been taken for a ride, Johnny."

Hatfield didn't say anything. He sat watching some children playing on the back gallery of the house. He was whistling softly to himself and his lean face was hard, a little dancing flame in his black eyes.

"Then," went on Saunders, "Young Billy Harden and Mason Barnes whom I took off a case down in El Paso and sent up to cover Garrett, got machine-gunned the next morning."

"Yeah? Did they go, too?" asked Johnny quietly.

"No. By some break they must have seen the car coming. They shot it out with whoever it was, and got three or four of them. Harden is in the hospital and Barnes has disappeared. Harden will get well."

"Allen, Potter, Roper, Garrett." Johnny said slowly. "All good men and old-timers. None of them would do anything to uncover themselves. Then Harden and Barnes—new, compared to the rest, but old enough in the game not to make a break." He stopped and began to whistle once more for a

moment, then, "Once there was a leak in Washington that cost the lives of two or three men."

"I know it, Johnny. But there isn't now. It couldn't be there, this time, because I sent those men up without calling them to Washington."

"Then, up in Detroit there is a man who is also an old-timer," Johnny drawled. "A man who knows most of your outfit and other units, by face anyway. It will be some one who has been in the service and gone crooked. All of the men you mention have been tied in with other outfits many times, captain."

"THAT'S right, Johnny," answered Saunders simply. "But how about Harden and Barnes? Barnes hasn't been in a year."

"Harden has been in for three or four years, and in Washington a lot. Whoever it is hasn't been in Detroit very long if he knows Billy Harden. If Barnes was seen with him, they'd knock him off also. What is it up there?"

"Two interlocking gangs of dope and Chink runners, with a steady pot-boiler of rum and what not. We are after a bird named Ed Paduski, who is chief of the bigger one, and a gent by the name of Jerry Malone, who is top cutter of the other. How far the police and customhouse and immigration bunch are in, I don't know. I'm not worrying about that end now, Johnny. I want the lad that's cost me four men. That's the reason I drove down to see you."

"If you want him any other way but dead," answered Johnny, calmly, "I reckon you better send some one else up."

"Why, Johnny," answered Captain Saunders mildly. "You know Uncle

likes to try 'em so that some of his assistant district attorneys can strut their stuff. But"—and the captain looked over at the children—"if you have to shoot—to protect your life or in defense of another agent—I'd be the last man to tell you not to. Especially if you could find time to tell him a little of how-come, before you did."

"Yes, suh, I sure aim on obeying all the rules," answered Johnny gravely.

"I brought you down a special appointment, Johnny. I know a man up there who will give you what help he can. He's Detective Lieutenant Carter. He worked down here three or four years as U. S. deputy marshal under Sawyer."

"I've heard of him. I was on the border when he was in Kentucky." Hatfield's eyes tightened a little. "Most of the boys worked around here at different times; especially lately," he added grimly. "It may be that his help is what did for the other boys."

"Forget it," interrupted Saunders. "Louis Carter was my top cutter in France. It couldn't be he, Johnny, any more than it could be you or I."

"I'll make contact with him then," answered Johnny. He knew Saunders, and knew that when he OK'd a man, the man was "right."

Saunders told him all that he had on the case and they discussed several men whom they knew who had quit the service, both in their unit and others. The captain had brought down a list made up for him in Washington of all resignations that had taken effect in the last four years. It wasn't complete, as many of the departments maintaining secret service units had stalled along and not given it. Every one of them plays tight-mouth with the other branches on everything.

When they finally rose, Saunders

said with a grin, "I'll be up myself, Johnny, as soon as I get away. I feel the urge of conducting a few corner preachin's."

"Dog-gone, that's good news," answered Johnny with a grin. "I'll sure attend some and get me converted."

After dinner they went out to where old Pappy Hatfield was looking at a colt.

"Pappy," announced Johnny, "some no-'count scoundrels up north done shot young Billy Harden all to pieces. Me and this here feller is goin' up and get us a couple of 'em. Don't reckon I'll be gone long."

"What are you takin' this feller fer?" demanded old Pappy, who looked like one of the old prophets, and all his life had acted differently from them as he could—which was somewhat differently. "He ain't kin folks, Johnny, like the Hardens. You go and git you a Harden to go along."

"This feller," lied Johnny promptly, "is kin to the other feller that got shot at the same time Billy Harden did. We don't need no one else, Pappy."

"Go on, then," ordered Pappy, "and git home soon as you can. Tell your ma and mosey along."

The thought that Johnny might get killed never entered old Pappy's head, and if it had it wouldn't have made any difference. The mountain Hatfields had killed or got killed for so long that it had ceased to interest Pappy.

CHAPTER V.

A RACE WITH DEATH.

TOMMY fled north, intending to go up as far as Marine City, some fifty-odd miles north, where he would cross the St. Clair River into Canada. He had a strong hunch that

the farther he got from Ed Paduski's gang and that gentleman himself, the better it would be for Mr. Thomas McCoy.

He slowed the car down as soon as he was sure he wasn't being pursued, and then drove steadily, the powerful engine eating up the miles. He was going to leave the car at Marine City and go across the river, then head for Hamilton, Ontario, where he had friends with whom he could hole up.

As he turned to the right going toward the river, he picked up a car whose driver evidently had the same idea about going to the river. The road was narrow and Tommy honked loudly for the other car to get over. Instead of doing it, the driver stepped on the gas and drew ahead for a minute. Tommy promptly did a little stepping himself and came right up behind him, once more honking.

If there was one thing he didn't like, it was to be held up on the road. The other driver didn't pay a bit of attention to him and Tommy dropped back a little so that he would have room to cut out to the left as soon as the road got a little wider. "I'll put you in the ditch, damn you!" he announced.

About a mile farther the road did widen a little and Tommy roared by—or rather, he almost got by, but not quite. The other driver saw no reason why he should let any other car by, being young and reckless himself, and gave his long, lean roadster all the power it had.

The two cars ran side by side for a minute, then the road narrowed and just which one tried to ditch the other was never decided. They both slewed off the road, one on each side. Tommy's car went in the ditch, came out, ran in again, did an instant nose dive, then went over on its side. Luckily for

Tommy it was the side away from the wheel. He crawled out, shaken, but absolutely unhurt.

The other car hit the ditch, and jumped out back on the road, swerved and actually cleared the ditch to go through a barbed wire fence. It ran about fifteen feet over a plowed field, and came to a stop, its nose buried in a haystack, with festoons of barbed wire hanging over the radiator.

It all happened, as Tommy said later, "before you could say scat to a blue-jay."

The driver of the car in the haystack got out, having remained at the wheel all through the flight. As the driver stepped over the ditch, his eyes widened and he barked, "For Pete's sake!" As he started to speak he reached for a Colt forty-five in a holster under his left arm, and long before he had finished the ejaculation, Tommy was looking directly down a round hole that looked as big as a twelve-inch gun.

The recognition was mutual. Tommy saw to his horror one of the two men he had ambushed in that basement.

"I'm going to kill you right now," said Mason Barnes firmly. "You done chased me to your death, feller."

"Aw, listen." Tommy had no particular hope of proving anything, but he wouldn't quit till the game was played out. "Whadda you want to do that for? I was only drivin' the car, honest. I didn't have nothin' against you lads. I'm a right guy. Feller, don't pull."

They were about the same age, neither one of them over twenty-two. They had the same reckless love of adventure. They had chosen different packs to run with, that was all.

"Dog-gone it," said Mason, stepping back a pace and lowering the Colt. "I haven't got the heart to do it with you

just standin' there. Billy Ha—some gents that I know would do it, I bet you. Draw your gun, feller, and you and me will shoot it out."

"Not any," answered Tommy firmly. "Here, you can take my gat." He raised his hands above his head. "I don't want any shootin' with you lads. You're too damn fast for me."

MASON stepped in and took Tommy's automatic from his hip pocket. "All right," he said. "You're right lucky you met me instead of some I've heard about. I reckon I'll put you under—" he caught himself almost in time, and the prompt interruption helped.

"Don't do 'er. What the hell, you and me are only pikers in this thing. Whadda we want to be killing each other for?" Tommy forgot that the other was the only one in a position to do any killing. "I'm high-ballin' away from Paduski's gang, and it looks like you are takin' it on the lam, too. You're working for Jerry Malone, ain't you? Here comes a car! Put that rod up, quick!"

Mason obeyed before the oncoming car got close enough to see it.

When it arrived the driver got out. "What happened?" the newcomer asked.

"Why," answered Tommy with a grin, "we was tryin' out two second-hand cars we was figurin' on buyin', and we got too close."

"It looks like it. Lucky you're alive. Anything I can do?"

"Not a thing, thanks. We're waitin' for a tow from Marine City."

The man grinned. "You kids will have a couple of cars to pay for," he chuckled as he drove on.

"Now what?" demanded Tommy. "Boy, I gotta get across the line. To

hell with that bus of Paduski's; let it lay. How about yours?"

"I got to get across, too," answered Mason firmly. "And damn quick. You were dead right about that 'lam' thing. Say, come clean, feller: was you sent after me? Take your time about answerin'. It's jake with me if you were. You can go one way and I'll go the other. I never killed no one yet, that is, in cold blood. You and me have just come too blame close to joinin' the angel chorus to be gunnin' each other."

"Me? After you? Well, for cryin' out loud! I should say not. Boy, I pulled out in the fog. That damn Tony Crispi of Paduski's cracked down on me plenty."

"All right, then, come on. We can send some one out from Marine City to get the cars. Maybe we can send for 'em later."

"Not me," answered Tommy positively. "Ed has got plenty of cars. You can if you want to. Where you going to head for? Me, I'm going to Hamilton for a little while, then up to Montreal and get me a boat for New York. Boy, my life ain't worth thirty cents in bad money around Detroit."

"I don't know," answered Mason with a grin as they started down the road as if they had been partners all their lives. "We was brought up from down below to do a little gun work and I haven't much jack on me. Down where I come from it's mostly all pistol fightin'. That was the first time I ever saw one of them machine guns work. I reckon my buddy is all shot to hell and I'm not aimin' on workin' alone."

"Boy, you ought to have seen some of it I've seen," boasted Tommy. "Hey, listen, let's you and me team up. I got plenty of jack on me. I

always carry my roll. We can fool around in Hamilton and then go to New York. I know lots of guys there that can use a couple of good men with a rod." His hat was eased over on the side of his head and pulled a little over one eye. Tommy's ambition was to be thought a "proud and hostile guy."

"I was aimin' on seein' a feller in Sarnia," answered Mason. That was no lie either. He had been ordered in case of a jam not to go to any one in Detroit and not to attempt to get in touch with Washington, but to go to Sarnia and report to a man there, who would attend to anything needful. That was the reason that Tommy had found him on this road.

"This bird," Mason went on, "is my second cousin and I was aimin' on borrowin' some jack from him."

"I'll wait for you," answered Tommy cheerfully. "If he hasn't got it, I got two grand on me, old kid. How about it, will we stick together? I hate like hell to travel alone."

Tommy was a sociable soul for all his utter lack of sense of right or wrong. Paduski was right, or at least partly right, when he called Tommy a "flying jib," which means a talkative drunk. Tommy was talkative even when not drunk; not in the way of telling of any operation, but always having something to say.

"Suits me," Mason said, giving Tommy back his gun. "How about these rods going across?"

"What? Hell, boy, the lad that will take us over wears six of them. Let's buy us a car in Sarnia and go to Hamilton in style. Hey, here's a funny one. I don't know your name. I'm Tommy Nothin'," and he laughed.

"All right, Tommy, I'm Mase Doo-flicker."

"That's a hell of a name, Doo-flicker," said Tommy sternly. "I bet your ma was a Goofus," and they both laughed. It was warm out, the air was like wine, they had plenty of cigarettes, they were both young and the world was their oyster.

CHAPTER VI.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT CARTER.

WHEN the young man called Billy opened his eyes, the world slowly stopped whirling around and smelling bad. He had, he was sure, been strapped onto an immense paddle wheel that kept turning around and around with him, trying to force him under where he would have to breathe against something that felt sticky and cold, then up, then back again.

Now he tried to sit up.

"No, don't," said a soft voice alongside. "You are in bed, in a hospital. Lie back now, like a nice boy."

His eyes turned as he obeyed orders and he saw the white of a uniform. They followed it up to where a pretty face, crowned by brick-red hair showing under a white cap, smiled down at him. His chest felt as if some one had recently withdrawn a red-hot poker from it, but it didn't pain very much. He could breathe now without smelling the sticky, wet thing.

"Here," the nurse slipped a firm, young arm under his shoulders; "take this." She held a cup to his lips.

"I've heard that 'take this' stuff before," said Billy Harden with a grin. It was a very weak one, but a grin nevertheless.

"I'll bet you have," answered the pretty nurse, grimly. "Your body shows it." Then as he drank and she

eased him down, she added: "Go to sleep now."

The next time he opened his eyes he felt much better. It was night, he could tell, as one or two electric lights were on. He lay there, then cautiously tried to sit up, expecting any moment to hear the soft voice say: "Stop that."

He heard some one by the foot of the bed call to some one else, then the quick patter of feet and a voice, not her voice, but one a good deal sterner, say: "Lie down again, please. You are not to sit up."

Billy didn't like that voice at all and to prove it, he did sit up all the way. As he made it, he saw another girl in a nurse's uniform at the foot of the bed coming around; also, sitting in a chair between his bed and the next unoccupied bed on the left, he made out a neatly dressed young man with blue eyes, whose white, even teeth showed as he smiled at the triumphant Billy.

"You—you idiot!" sputtered the nurse. "You lie down again, right now."

"No, suh," said Billy firmly. "I won't do 'er. I been lying down for nine million years and I'm going to sit up for a minute."

"Oh, you are?" answered the nurse, fire in her eye. "Well, we'll see whether you are or not," and she bent over a little, both of her very capable arms out. Billy had just as much chance of not lying down as a lame dog in a running match, and he knew it the minute he saw the nurse's eyes.

Just as her arms went around him, gently but also very firmly, some one said from the foot of the bed: "All right, nurse. I'll attend to it."

The nurse straightened up and came to attention, or what corresponded to attention in a hospital when nurses are given orders by the chief staff surgeon.

"Very well, doctor." She went down the line of beds.

"Now, young feller me lad," said the grizzled old surgeon, "what's it all about?"

"I wanted to sit up and she didn't see it that way," grinned the recalcitrant patient.

"I see. Well, it won't hurt you, if you want to do it, for a few minutes. You can talk a little to this gentleman, but not too much. You're just healing up two holes in your chest, very near your lungs, son. Take it easy, and you'll be all right."

The doctor arranged some pillows back of Billy, smiled, patted him on the shoulder lightly, and went on. On the way out he stopped the nurse and said something. The nurse looked at her wrist watch and nodded.

"THAT'S that," said Billy, looking at the young man. "Mister," he went on plaintively, "I wish you'd tell me right away who you are. I'd sure hate to take up much time guessing."

"Just as soon as not," answered the young man cheerfully. "I'm Detective Lieutenant Carter from headquarters."

"Dog-gone! Wait a minute; yeah, I got 'er now. Last I remember was that jasper shooting it out and me telling my buddy to fog it. How come it's raining detective lieutenants on me?"

Carter laughed. "Why, we're not educated up to machine gun battles up here in Detroit and we thought if we hung around you might tell us the how-come. That's how come I'm here. Boy, you been in 'em before."

"How do you know?" grinned Billy.

"I got a flash at you when they brought you down. I counted six scars before I got halfway down."

"Shucks! I fell on a barbed wire fence one time and—"

"Oh, that was it. What's your name?"

"Billy Harden, please, suh," answered Billy promptly. "Do you reckon you could sneak me over a cigarette?"

"Not here, old kid, they'd throw me out. How long you been up from Kentucky, Billy?" It wasn't in any way a third degree questioning, more like a conversation to pass the time.

"Dog my cats! How'd you know that I came from Kentuck? That's why you're a lieutenant, I bet you."

"Easy," laughed Carter. "Your name is Harden, you say 'please, suh,' and 'reckon' and 'shucks.' Boy, the Hardens are a Kentucky outfit and from Breathitt County, at that."

"Yes, suh, an' proud of it. How come you know about Breathitt County?"

"Why," answered Carter with a grin. "I spent two or three quiet years down there when I was one of Uncle's men-at-arms. Who were the birds that jumped you?"

"That's a funny stunt," answered Billy promptly. "We never saw them before, honest Injun. We stopped to get some cigarettes and saw the old brown muzzle comin' out of the side of a car on the way right smack to us. Man, howdy, we didn't need any tellin' what it was. We holed up and went to shootin'. Then I wake up here."

"All right, tight-mouth," said Carter still grinning. "I'm going to sit right here just the same, and when you're—"

The hard-boiled nurse came up "Time's up," she announced crisply, beginning to take the pillows away. "Now lie down and go to sleep."

"You'll pardon me," asked Billy Harden politely.

"Sure," answered Carter with a smile. "Go to sleep, Kentuck, I'll see that no bad old machine gunners get you."

DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT CARTER was relieved a little later and drove into his home in the outskirts of one of Detroit's suburbs. He put his car in the garage, looked at his watch, which read twelve-thirty, said "Holy cats, I didn't know it was that late," and hurried into the neat little white house *via* the back door.

His wife, a very pretty French girl, who loved him deeply, was waiting for him in the immaculate kitchen.

"I didn't know it was so late," Carter began, after kissing the upturned face. "I was talking to the chief and—"

"*Merveilleux!*" and she smiled. "*C'est tres difficile, n'est-ce pas?* Is it not hard, the excuse to think?"

"Yes, it is not," grinned Carter, "not marvelous at all. I can think 'em up with one hand."

"See, my love, there is waiting you a man who came in the dark from the woods to the north. He has of the wait been hours." Marie was very proud of her English.

"What! Where is he, Marie? You know him?"

"*Non*, I know him not. He has of the smile and the face of niceness. He is waiting in the feed house, where he came upon me."

"In the feed house? I'll go out and see what he wants. I've eaten, darling. You get to bed like a nice girl. I won't be long. He's probably some pigeon."

As he went out in the dark toward the feed house he loosened the thirty-eight police special in its holster. It might be a stool pigeon and then it

might not. Carter knew several men who would be glad to see him removed from the scene. He got to the door, opened it, and, as he did, stepped back against the wall on the outside.

"All right," he said curtly, his hand on his gun, "I'm Carter. Come on out."

Some one laughed softly. "Reckon you better come in, Carter. Captain Jimmie Saunders sent me up here to tell you that as a top cutter you were a fine nurse to sing a baby to sleep with M. I. songs."

"Yeah?" Carter's hand came away from his gun and a grin rose to his lips. "It must be hot stuff when the captain's messenger has to hole up in a feed house to deliver it." He stepped in and suggested, "Open that door to the right. There's a cubbyhole in there, with no windows."

He reached for a flash light on a shelf by the door.

Quite a little later Johnny Hatfield said: "Who were the men with Paduski?"

"The Chi Kid and an Italian named Rocca. That's how I got it. All I know came third-hand, Johnny. None of the gang that were there dared to say much. One of them told his sweetie a little and she told a pigeon of mine."

"All right. I got the lay of the land, I reckon. I'll get me this Chi Kid and Rocca to start off with. Then I'll dive under and see how close to Ed Paduski I can come up. The man we want is the one that has sent four good men west. If you can rustle me some sandwiches I sure would appreciate it. I've been in those woods since dark this morning."

"How'd you come in?" asked Carter as he rose.

"Drove down from Sarnia."

"Do you want to be covered,

Johnny? I can put a couple of good men—"

"Not any. You get the dope I want and send it to me General Delivery. My gosh, I'm goin' to be a regular bad man, no foolin'. Boy, if you knew how I was yearnin' for those sandwiches you'd move out."

"Stick around," laughed Carter. "I'll bring 'em pronto and in haste."

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNINVITED GUEST.

ROCCA and the Chi Kid were pulling a party at Maudie Lamont's. There were four other men present.

As soon as the six had come in the ornate dance hall running back from the parlor to the rear, all of the men who had been dancing or sitting around went out. Here and there one or two had finished the dance or their drinks, but they were men who worked with Rocca and the Chi Kid, or were friendly with them.

"Close the doors, Maudie," ordered the Chi Kid. "We just pulled off a hot one and we're buyin' the house. Open up a couple of cases of that last stuff and bring the cards and chips."

It was two o'clock in the morning when they came in, and by three the party was in full swing. It was a quiet party, very little noise. The men were tight-lipped gangsters, all armed, and none of them snowbirds or hop-heads. They drank steadily and gambled, playing stud, table stakes.

Of the six men sitting at the table Rocca was the most under the influence of the liquor, but he held himself steady, the liquor only showing in his eyes and his more than reckless betting. He was losing steadily, but

all he said was, "That's good—that beats me—you win."

The Chi Kid laughed after the man next to him had turned over his hole card, showing another king, which gave him a pair against Rocca's pair of jacks.

"Boy, that was a wallop," the Chi Kid told Rocca as the winner pulled a thousand dollars in chips over. "Lady Luck has quit you for fair."

Rocca gave a thin-lipped smile. "Unlucky at cards, lucky in love. The game is never over until the—"

One of the long windows at the rear of the room—which was on the first floor of the house—slid up, and a man stepped swiftly into the room, leaving the window open behind him.

He was dressed in a mechanic's suit of overalls which was covered with grease and grime. His cap was pulled down over his eyes and he had on a pair of big horned spectacles. On his face there was a three or four-days' growth of bristling beard. The first four buttons of the overalls were open, and in his right hand, held loosely at his side, was a Colt forty-five.

The men at the table, those facing the window, saw him as he stepped over the window sill, the others turned as they heard the window go up. They were gangsters all, they knew without being told what was going to happen.

They were armed—but their hands were spread out over a table, either fingering chips or covering their hole cards which had just been dealt them. There was no chance to get to a gun until the man who had come in began shooting at one of them. Then the rest could draw.

It was a bad box to be caught in, though, and they knew that also. They were all sitting down around a table in

each other's way a lot. Two of them had their backs to him, two sat at either end of the table, half facing him, and the two with their backs to the wall facing him were close together and in a corner.

They sat there, faces impassive, their eyes intent on him, waiting for a break.

Which one he wanted none of them knew. It might be all, or just one. Whatever it was, for the moment the play was up to him.

"THAT'S nice, little boys," he jeered. "Sit quiet for teacher.

Come on, Rocca, and you too, Mr. Chi Kid. Teacher's going to take you for a nice ride. Get up and—"

They knew what it was now and the four men swayed out a little in their seats as Rocca and the Chi Kid started to get up. Both of them had plenty of nerve, and they thought that once on their feet, or even halfway up, they could outshoot this crazy nut of a mechanic who had come in on them.

Of the rest, at least two out of the four would be glad to see anything happen to Rocca and the Chi Kid before they killed the one that did it. At the minute the situation had cleared as far as they went.

"You goof," the Chi Kid snarled as he was getting up. "Put that rod down!"

Rocca's hand slipped behind him with the speed of a swallow's dip. The man seemed to be looking at the Chi Kid and about to say something. Rocca had spent hours a day practicing that draw, and no man in the underworld of Detroit, and few elsewhere, could come within even close of equaling it. The way he was getting up, he was partly hidden by the men sitting across from him.

Fast as it was, the Colt held by the mechanic was faster. The muzzle flitted up half an inch, and from where it was at the man's side a soft-nosed lead bullet crashed through the head of the killer who shot old men in the back. Rocca fell sidewise, almost covering the man who sat beside him.

The Chi Kid, when he saw Rocca reach for his gun, stopped talking and stepped back a pace. He was all the way up now and into his crafty brain had come the lightninglike flash, "Rocca will take it, and I can get this guy!" He started his draw. He heard the report, saw the gun muzzle turn on him and knew he was dead before the bullet hit between his eyes. As he fell his body overturned the chair he had got up from and they went to the floor together.

From the time that the Chi Kid had said "down!" the whole thing hadn't taken a count of two. Now the intruder's gun was up to the level of his waist, menacing the men at the table. The man on whom Rocca had fallen pushed the body away. The other three sat as before.

"That will be all to-night," said the man calmly, backing toward the window. "Unless one of you wants to strut his stuff. My orders only covered those two wharf rats. No? No one wants any? Well," as he got to the window, "tell Ed Paduski that Johnny Hatfield's in town and is shootin' his way up to him."

The four men sat there, their faces as cold and hard as ever. No one moved nor answered. There was no loyalty in them for the men who had been killed at their side. Each man figured for himself only, his own chances, and what he could make with them. Now they all knew that the slightest move would bring death, and they sat and

watched the man step backward out of the window and disappear in the darkness.

THAT afternoon Detective Lieutenant Carter met one of them. "I heard that the Chi Kid and Rocca got theirs last night at Maudie's," Carter said genially.

"I heard so too," answered the other. "Probably a lot of hooley. I got in from over the line just a little while ago, and some damn sleigh-rider was tellin' about it. I been up north for a week and don't know much. What did you hear about it?"

"About the same as you, I guess," answered Carter indifferently. "Well, we don't give a damn. Let 'em all kill each other; less work for us. Behaving yourself nowadays, Jack?"

"Always and ever. You got me wrong, Carter."

"That's so," agreed Carter cheerfully. "Well, never mind; some day I'll get you right, Jack, old kid," and he walked on.

That night Carter went to the hospital, where Billy Harden was still in bed, much to that young man's disgust.

"I haven't got a darn thing to do, Frank," Carter said to the detective sergeant sitting on guard by the bed. "Go out and get the air for a couple of hours. I'd just as soon sit here as not."

"I'll be glad to." The other detective rose.

"After you get out," said Billy Harden, who was sitting up, "I hope a brick comes along and breaks your leg in eight places."

"Why not a machine gun?" sneered the detective sergeant. "Wait till we get you down to the station house; you'll sing another song."

"None of that, Thompson," Carter said curtly. "That's against orders. I didn't think you'd pull it."

"I was only kiddin' him," answered Thompson, reaching for his hat. "We're good friends, aren't we, Billy?"

"Yeah, with a copper on the bet. Go on away from me before I kill you with these pills."

"What's he been trying to do, Billy?" asked Carter as he sat down after Thompson had gone.

"Trying to get the history of my life, I reckon," answered Harden, who liked the well-built, soldierly, blue-eyed lieutenant. "He's been digging ever since he got here to relieve Ryan. My gosh, I'll get to know all the elbows in Detroit, I bet you."

"There's quite a few of them, Billy," answered Carter with a smile.

"Well, I brought a paper along. Want me to read you the news?"

"Go ahead as long as that darn old female crab that's on nights will let you. I wish the day nurse would take the night shift."

"I'll bet you do. Well, here's something for you, Billy." He read:

"Gangsters killed. Bodies found in alley between Twenty-Eighth and Twenty-Ninth Street on Atlantic Avenue identified as the Chi Kid and Michael Rocca. Both are well known in the underworld and rumored to be henchmen of a noted chief who practically controls the—"

"Say, can't you find something more cheerful to read? I don't care anything about—"

"That's right, Billy. Well, I'll turn to the society page. How's this?" Carter got up and closed the door. Billy had been transferred to a private room. As he came back and sat down he saw that the grin had gone from

Harden's face and that his eyes were alert.

He picked up the paper and began:

"Among the arrivals this weeks in our fair city were two very distinguished gentlemen, Captain James Norcross Saunders from Washington and Mr. John Anson Hatfield of Kentucky, U. S. A. It is rumored that—"

"Let me see that paper," demanded Billy, leaning forward.

"Nothin' doin'," answered Carter with a grin. "Listen to this, Billy:

"It is rumored that they came up to see Detective Lieutenant Louis Carter, who was Captain Saunders's top cutter in France and points west. It is also rumored that the sad knocking off of Mr. Rocca and the Chi Kid may be attributed to the arrival of the noted guest, Mr. John Anson Hatfield. It is also—"

"My gosh," interrupted Billy. "Put that paper down, feller, and tell me things right away."

"Well," grinned Carter. "I shouldn't tell you a darn thing, tight-mouth, but—"

He told Billy what Hatfield had told him to say, then went on: "Johnnie told me to pass the word that Barnes is all right and in contact. Also, Billy, he told me to tell you about Garrett."

"What about him?" asked Billy, the grin going from his lips, although he knew before he asked, by the way Carter said it.

Carter told him, and Billy's white young face grew hard and his lips became a tight thin line.

"I'm going to get up," he announced, "and give Johnny a hand. I'll get me that Ed Paduski if I have to—"

"Johnny says that you are to stay

right here, young feller, and get well. Capt'n Saunders told me to tell you to do as Johnny says and he'll come and get you for—the finals."

"Dog-gone it," said Billy. "Get away from me and let me get well, then."

CHAPTER VIII.

REIGN OF TERROR.

CAPTAIN SAUNDERS, dressed in old faded "preacher's" clothes, looking far different from the natty, well set-up army officer he was, and Johnny Hatfield, looking more like a hard-boiled longshoreman than he did like an automobile mechanic, sat in the feed house with Carter.

"It was easy," Johnnie said. "I bought me an old flivver one-ton truck with 'Service Station' painted on the side and rambled around town with it until I got your word where the Chi Kid and Rocca were. I drove up in the alley, got out, went in—and came out again and drove off. Went to the dump I had rented, changed my clothes, got shaved and when it got light I hopped a street car full of people going to work; and man howdy, they were all so sleepy they didn't look at any one. Then I holed up in the woods."

"And no one saw you?" asked Saunders.

"Not a soul. The alley was empty. That is, no one saw me but the gentlemen in the room at Maudie's."

"And that brings us to what I want to know," said Saunders. "Just what was the idea of your announcing that Johnny Hatfield stuff?"

"You say you told them to tell Ed Paduski that you were in town and

shooting your way up to him. I don't get, it, Johnny."

"Well, here it is. This man that is tipping may know me or he may not. He may have heard of me—not that I'm famous or—"

"Cut out the modesty thing," grinned Saunders. "We'll admit that you're modest; go on. Chances are, if he's an ex-service man he has. Go on from there."

"I figure that Ed Paduski will get the word. First, what will he do?"

"Easy," said Carter. "He'll get all his gorillas together and put a reward on your head."

"Right. Then what, if I knock off a couple more?"

"Just a minute, young feller," said Saunders. "Did it ever occur to you to arrest a man? You know damn well that Uncle won't stand for this knocking-off stuff. What are you trying to do, save money for the taxpayers?"

"I've never killed a man yet," said Johnny gravely, "unless that man was trying to kill me. He either had something in his hand or was reaching for it."

"That's right, Johnny," answered Saunders with a smile that showed how much he thought of the slim, tanned Kentuckian. "Only you never try to talk 'em out of it."

"Well, suh," grinned Johnny, "I never seem to have time."

"Mostly," went on Saunders, "you reverse the English; you try to talk 'em into it."

"Why," said John Anson Hatfield slowly, "I've always classed the man that brings drugs in my country—drugs that mean misery and suffering to many more people than the one that takes it—as in the class of a cotton-mouth mocassin or copperhead, and to be killed like one."

"You're right, Johnny," answered Saunders quietly. "No matter what the rules and regulations are, you are right. Go on."

"I figure if I can go through with a few more, Ed Paduski will begin to get jumpy. Also, it's a pipe that he'll do some talking to the bird we're after. Maybe he won't have to; this gent may know me or about me."

"If he does he'll tell Paduski who I am—"

"And describe you also, if he can," interrupted Saunders.

"That's right, if he can. But I am coming in and out, staying only a minute." Here Johnny grinned. "When Carter gets word where they are, I come in—then go out. I don't care if our snake-in-the-grass has told them what the John Hatfield that he knew looks like—if he ever knew me. It's catchin' before hangin', capt'n."

"And also you are taking ze one grand chance of being tailed or having a plant fixed up to greet you. They are not all hop-heads, Johnny."

"THAT'S what Uncle pays me to do. What I want to do is to get Ed Paduski on the run, mentally; then come in on him some night, when he is alone, and make him tell me who it is that tips him about Federal agents. After he does, by gosh, I'll arrest him and Uncle can hang him for George Garrett and the rest. How's that?"

"You're going to start a reign of terror, is that it? Well, I doubt very much if you can get him to weaken, Johnny."

"He is a snowbird and always has some in him. You'll have to kill him, Johnny, just as soon as he sees you, knowing who you are."

"That's on the knees of the gods,"

grinned Johnny. "Maybe we can spot our man first; then I'll kill Mr. Paduski with pleasure. In defense of my life, of course."

"All right," answered Saunders. "Let it ride that way. I'll be preaching on the corners down near Eighth every night this week. I made contact with the United States Marshal and he sent for Chick Absolom and Bob Beardsley; you can get to them at this phone number, Johnny. One or the other will always be there. Carter, did you run on to anything?"

"No, sir," answered Carter, once more the first sergeant. "Of course I can tell you which policemen Paduski and Malone are paying protection money to if that would help."

"Later. It doesn't interest me at the moment. I mean, did you spot any dick or uniformed man that it might be worth while digging into?"

"No, sir. I went over the records as far as I could. Most of them have been on the force for longer than five years. The new men—"

"All right; keep digging in. It may be a new man on the force or it may be one of Paduski's gang and not touch the force at all. Look up the records of the new men and see if you can find anything."

"Yes, sir. Johnny, I've been promised some dope to-night about another hang-out of the gang. Will I pass it at the same place?"

"Yes, I'll get it. Now I'll go ahead until I get up to Paduski and try him out. If he tells—"

"We'll all go and get the other gentleman," put in Captain Saunders grimly. "Remember that, Johnny. I mean it. No going by yourself. This is a point of honor with me. I want Billy Harden and Mason Barnes there. You understand, Johnny."

"Yes, suh, I understand. If Ed Paduski tells me, I'll report to you."

THE said Ed Paduski sat in Jerry Malone's finely furnished apartment within two blocks of the city hall. With him were Rita; Jerry's wife; and Jerry Malone himself, a thin, tall, tight-lipped Irish man of about fifty, a gunman, gambler, crook, and dope smuggler who had fought himself up from the ranks to command of his own push.

Paduski had driven boldly through town with three of his gang as guards who now waited in the car. There was nothing on him, and he knew it. He was aware the police knew that two of his best men had been killed, and that he was without question responsible for a good many dead men found out on the country road; but proving it in court under the fire of a battery of high-priced criminal lawyers was another thing, an impossible thing unless the police had eye-witnesses. And to get a gangster who had ever seen anything to go up on the witness stand and tell about it was like asking him to agree to be killed immediately afterward.

The flash had reached Paduski three minutes after the killing, and he had driven in to get the news at first hand.

The two men and the two women were sitting at the dining room table, on which were bottles and glasses. Standing between the living room and the dining room was one of the four survivors of the interrupted poker game. He was called Sandy McGuire, and he had been with Paduski for years.

"Say that again," demanded Paduski. "Use the same words he did."

Sandy answered slowly, "He said, 'My orders only covered those two wharf rats. Tell Ed Paduski that Johnny Hatfield's in town and is shootin' his way up to him.'"

"He's shootin' his way up to me," repeated Paduski slowly. Then his composure broke. "By God!" he cried. "I'll give him a chance to get up to me! I'll find him, the rat. Pass the word that I want that weasel alive, and—"

"Steady, Ed," drawled Rita. "Take hold of yourself. Find him first. You go, Sandy; tell the boys that Ed just laughed and said he'd attend to Mr. Hatfield."

"Who the hell made you the boss?" shouted Paduski, rising from the table. "I've stood enough!"

"And now sit down again," she interrupted calmly. "I've cut you twice, Ed—and I'll do it again if you dare to touch me." A long, slender knife came into her hand as if by magic. "You know I'll never be manhandled by any one."

Paduski stared at her. He was not afraid of a gun, but he was of a knife; like a good many others. He knew she would cut him; she had before, when he had started after her in a drug frenzy. Twice before; then he learned his lesson, and however crazy he got, the fear of the knife was always there.

Now he stood and looked at her. She had called him down, in front of a rival gang leader and one of his own men. He saw their impassive faces, all three trying to show absolute indifference.

"You win," he said shortly. "Get out, Sandy, and pass the word as she says."

Rita noticed the "she," and her eyes tightened a little.

"And that's all you pass, you understand?" snarled Paduski.

"That's all, chief," answered Sandy, declaring his loyalty. He turned on his heel and went out.

PADUSKI sat down, breathing heavily.

"Take it easy, Ed," Malone said. "I'll help you get this guy."

"Yeah? Since when have I got to come to you for help? He might be comin' to you himself—for more orders."

Malone laughed. "Take another sniff, old kid. When I go to war, I declare it. The Chi Kid and Rocca were good friends of mine; that's the reason I said I'd help."

"I don't need any help," answered Paduski, rising. "Come on, Rita, let's be driving. I want to see a couple of lads out at Bob's. You hooked up for to-night's stuff, Jerry?"

"Yeah, boy, we'll come out and get it. Don't let this Hatfield thing get your nerve, Ed."

"I won't," answered Paduski grimly. "I'll attend to him damn quick."

After they had gone Malone grinned and poured out a drink. "She'll cut him down to her size, then lick him some day. He better lay off that damn coke; he's slipping badly. Notice how jumpy he was?"

"Yes," Malone's wife replied. "I hope she does get him. What she could ever see in him is beyond me. You better pull away, Jerry."

"I am going to, after to-night. This business of croaking Federal dicks is bad stuff. I told that fool not to knock off that last one, but, no, he knew it all.

"They're bad lads to monkey with. You get one, and there's another right behind him. This Hatfield is a dick

sent up here to clean up, allee samee gang stuff, I'll bet."

"Are you in the clear as far as that goes?" demanded his wife.

"Yes, as far as I know. Some of the birds that got taken for a ride may have been government cops, but I did not know it. Let's go out."

THAT night two of Ed Paduski's drivers pulled into the rear of a lonely farmhouse and sat in their cars by the barn. It was a moonlight night, but the moon was going in and out behind clouds.

Beside one of the drivers sat the bartender who had taken the hoodwinked old man, Pop Nichols, by the neck and brought him to Paduski. He had wanted to get some fresh air and had gone on the trip. In one of the cars was twenty thousand dollars' worth of cocaine and heroin. The other was a pilot car.

"I hope to hell Jerry Malone's bunch get here pretty soon," said one of the drivers as he got out and came over to the car where the two were sitting. "I got me a swell date to-night."

A man came from one of the barns. He was dressed as a farmer and staggered a little as he walked toward them. The driver who had been talking said, "Heads up!" The other two straightened up in the seat, and all three drew guns. The man wavered around a little and then came up to the car. The moon came out bright just then, and they could see the silly grin on his face.

"Whaddayer doin' here?" he demanded. "Got any licker?"

"Get the hell away from here, you damn rube!" snarled one of the drivers. "Where the hell is Sam, letting some one come by him?"

"Sam?" the farmer replied. "He's

drunker'n nine hundred dollars. Come on, get out, and le's all have a drink. I'm—"

"Oh, hell," said the man who had spoken. "Get away from here, you damn hick, before I—"

The three men had lowered their guns just a little as they had relaxed. To them it was only a drunken farmhand, coming in to bother them for a minute.

The man standing by the car, the one who was so concerned over his swell date, had lowered his gun until his hand was hanging straight down his side.

"Listen, rube, go on, now, get the hell away from here. There's no licker around here at all."

"Well, that is sure too bad," drawled the stranger in an entirely different voice. "I would like me a drink—before I start the rat killin'."

As he spoke, a Colt .45 materialized in his hand. The saying that the hand is quicker than the eye may be true, and may not; but none of the three men saw him reach for a gun.

The man sitting in the car snapped his gun up—and Johnny Hatfield sent a forty-five caliber bullet through his brain. The man who was standing tried to raise his gun again, but it dropped from his hand as he fell back against the car, dead.

The bartender, who had drawn with the rest, sat there, paralyzed with fear. He had seen two men killed before he could raise a gun. He sat there, looking at that hard, tanned face with its deadly black eyes within a foot of his own, and heard a soft drawling voice say, "Well, come on; you got a gun in your hand—start using it, feller. Step out of the car." And Hatfield stepped back a foot. "I'll give you that much of a break accordin' to

order. Get out and walk ten paces, then turn and strut your stuff, if you've got any to strut. I'm Johnny Hatfield; I'll give you an even break."

THE bartender, who had come out to get some fresh air, drew a long, quivering breath. How much sand he had in his craw, given enough time to rally it, is problematical. But now, with a dead man within three feet of him and one beside him, so close that he could feel the still warm body touching him, he had none.

"Oh, God," he whispered, the cold, hard face and hot black eyes within a foot of his own, "I—I—oh, don't do it! I—I—don't!"

"Yellow," snarled the tight lips that seemed to fill the world. "Yellow to the core. Get out and fight like a man."

"I—you got me. I give up." The gun fell from his hand to the floor of the car.

"I ought to kill you," went on the lips, "and I would—but I got orders different. Listen, yellow. You drive this car; where is the stuff? Answer, you damn rat, or I'll blow your head off." The Colt came against his head with a force that jarred him to his toes.

"In the back—in the flap. I—I ain't—"

"I know damn well you ain't," said Johnny grimly. "You freeze while I get it, or you will be." He stepped back and leaned over the side of the car, to come up with a package. "Now," he said, "you drive in; and when you get there, tell Ed Paduski that Johnny Hatfield is two closer to him. Do you get it, yellow?"

"Yes," answered the bartender in a whisper, "I get it. I'll tell him."

"See that you do, or I'll come in to Fat Cardill's saloon and take you out from behind the bar."

Hatfield stepped back. The bartender started the car, turned, and drove out of the farmyard.

Hatfield went back into the barn. Carter turned from a window, his own gun in his hand. "Well, Johnny, I've seen some killin' in my time, but that's the fastest yet. My tip was good, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, boy. I sure tried to obey Capt'n Saunders's orders that time, didn't I? I talked to that gent until I was black in the face, and I couldn't make him get goin', so I let him go."

Carter laughed. "How about the first two, Johnny?"

"They had guns out," answered Johnny gravely, as they started for Carter's car. "Now I'll go out and get me Tony Crispi, and then make the play for Ed Paduski."

"My God, Johnny, why don't you call it a day? Tony Crispi is the fastest wop in Detroit. You may—"

Johnny grinned as he got in the car. "I'd like to see just one fast gent up here. All the rest have been plumb slow."

CHAPTER IX.

HOLED UP.

"HEY, Mase," said Tommy McCoy, late of Paduski's mob, as he stood at the window looking out at the rain beating down on a Hamilton street. "This darn stuff of being holed up in Canada is getting me nuts. Let's get out and do something."

"Aw, listen," answered his new-found "partner" from the bed of their room in a quiet apartment on a residential street. "Take it easy for a

little while longer." He went back to the story he was reading.

"I'm fed up," declared Tommy firmly. "We been here three weeks—that's plenty." He looked out at the rain for a minute or so, then turned. "How game are you, Mase?" he demanded.

"I'd give any snake the first two bites," grinned Mase, putting down the magazine. "Why?"

"Well, I know something. Listen, if we were regular guys, we'd go over and raid that dump of Ed Paduski's."

"What! Not a hell of awhile ago all you wanted of Ed Paduski was distance between you. Feller, you got brave all of a sudden."

"Aw, I ain't afraid of that bull-buster; besides, I bet you that we can pick a time when he won't be there. Listen, Mase, would you take a chance for fifty grand?"

"I'd hate to tell you what I'd do for that much. Shoot, Mr. Tommy. Nothing, I'm wid ye."

"All right, then, listen. I know his hidin' place for all his junk, no foolin'. He cashes in, then he turns the jack into stones and plants them. Boy, he's got some rocks that go ten carats. One day I was fussin' around and I saw him lookin' them over. I know where he hides them."

"Yeah? And he's got eight or ten gorillas hidden around there also, old kid."

"No, he hasn't, unless he's there. We could go in and hide outside till daybreak; then if he is there we could ease back, and no harm done. If he isn't around, there would only be the cook and maybe one bartender. It's only when he's throwin' a party that all the gang is there. How about it? We can drive over, hit there about four in the morning; hole up, see

what's doing; then if it's right, go in, get them, and be on our way. Boy, our reps will be made if we can pull that stunt on Ed Paduski."

"My gosh, Tommy, he'll hunt us to hell and back. Do you think he'll stand for a play like that and not come after us? We couldn't get far enough away."

"Aw, he's only strong in Detroit. Once we get to New York, there's plenty of lads that would knock him off for a hundred case note, if we couldn't. Of course, if you've got cold feet, we'll—"

"Don't pull that stuff. Come on. Only thing is, I was figuring how close he is with the cops. How close is he, Tommy?"

"Darned if I know. I never was along when he was doin' business with any of them. I know they let us go through with hot cars, and that's all I do know."

"Then, you wasn't one of the higher-ups?" asked Mase, as he got up from the bed. "When do you want to start?"

"Higher-up, nothing. All I did was to drive for him. I only been in a year. Most of the time I been driving his woman, Rita, around."

"Behave," grinned Mase. "You told me that you seen a lot of machine-gun stuff. You killed all those government cops!"

"What government cops? I did not. I never killed no one," Tommy confessed. "That time we jumped you birds was the first time I ever was in any of the rough stuff—and I didn't stay long then," he added with a grin.

"I highballed it out of there myself," said Mase. "Well, I'll go with you, Tommy. We can drive over and take a look-see, anyway. Doesn't Paduski pull any parties with cops in? I'd hate to run into a bunch of those

fatties, after what I've done. Boy, they'd throw my pants in the swing."

"Not in Michigan they wouldn't," said Tommy, brushing back his sleek brown hair. "It's track thirteen and a washout up here."

"Yeah? Well, I'd rather get the rope or the hot seat than life, any time. Come on, let's go."

CHAPTER X.

FAST WITH A GUN.

ED PADUSKI, with his body-guard, Tony Crispi, sat in Jerry Malone's apartment. Now there were no women present, just the three of them.

"It's easy to dope out," Malone said with a sneer. "You're getting done to you what you've been doing to other lads, that's all. Some one is tipping off your mob to this bird Hatfield. I thought you were going to attend to him?"

"No one in my push is doing the tipping," answered Paduski smoothly. He had used enough snow to make him what he called "right." He sat at the table, toying with a whisky glass, his face impassive, his eyes cold. "In yours, maybe, but not mine. Your men knew of the transfer point, also, Malone."

"That's right, they do. So do a lot of people, like the John Laws out there in the country. But only you and I knew just what time it was coming over."

Paduski laughed. "But we ordered our drivers north, didn't we? Any one who knew them and saw them start would know that something was coming down."

"That being the case, why try for a tip-off lad? Any one of six men could

do it; or any of their women, or their landladies, or fifty, as far as this load went. What you want to do is to get this Hatfield. If you don't, you won't have a man left soon." Jerry Malone laughed, without friendliness.

"I'll get him," answered Paduski. "What I want to know is, where to bring the next load. I think we better—"

"As far as I am concerned," interrupted Malone, shifting a little in his seat, so that his right side was toward Tony Crispi, "you needn't figure. I'm washed up, as far as doing any more business with you goes. I think you're slipping, and I have thought so ever since you knocked off that government cop out in the open with twenty men to see it. Then, not content with that, you announce who he was. I'm done, Ed."

"There was not a man in that room," answered Paduski slowly, "that would not swear that he was killed in self-defense—and by some one from the stairs. Because I've struck a piece of bad sledding, you're quitting, is that it?"

"Exactly," answered Malone calmly. "I don't throw in with men that have had luck like you've been getting lately. And—"

The lights flickered and went out. There were one or two quick rustles, as of cloth against cloth, in the absolute stillness, then instantly came Malone's voice. "No one move! It's not my doing!" The lights came on. The three men sat there, each with a gun in his hand.

Paduski laughed. "I was just going to pull. This is a bad time for the lights to go."

"There's no plant here," answered Malone shortly. "I never had to frame one. Whoever comes here goes away

again as soon as he wants to. This is my—"

The lights went out again and this time stayed out for thirty seconds. Malone swore viciously at the apartment, the janitor, the owner, and as he finished the lights came on.

"Well," Paduski rose, "that's that. All right, Malone, from now on we are each on our own. Come on, Tony."

"Wait a minute," said Malone. "I been thinking it over. You and I have been in some heavy plays, Ed, and if it's jake with you, I'll go through with you. We can get this Hatfield sooner or later."

"Sooner," said Tony Crispi, who had been drinking quite a little. "Just as soon as I get my eyes on him. We can frame—"

THE telephone rang and Malone went into the hall and answered.

"Yes, it is. I should say we have got trouble with the lights. Yes, twice. What the hell's the matter with this dump anyway? If it isn't the lights, it's something else? What do I care about a cross in the wire? All right, send him up; send six up for all I care. I'm going to move out if I can't get better service."

He hung up the receiver and came back. "That was some fool in the office downstairs. They said there was a cross or something in the wires and the electricians were working on it. How about it, Ed? Let's you and me see if we can't get this Hatfield."

"Fair enough," murmured Paduski. "If it's a tipoff the only way to do is to start a phony, and be there when he jumps."

The bell rang at the apartment door. "It's the electrician," announced Malone. "Let him in, will you, Tony? Stick around with him."

Tony Crispi got up, a sneer on his hard face. "Afraid I'm the one that's tippin', Malone?"

"Not any," answered Malone. "Only this frame will be by Ed and me. Then we'll know who to blame if anything happens."

Tony opened the door. "All right," he snarled, "come on in." As he said it his eyes flashed the message to his brain that the man standing there had on the same kind of clothes, the greasy overall, the low pulled cap, the opened four buttons that marked the man who had killed the Chi Kid and Rocca. Just before a steel-like hand closed on his throat and drew him into the hall, swung him around and pulled the door almost shut so that it wouldn't snap lock after him, he knew that he was face to face with Johnny Hatfield.

Detective Lieutenant Carter had been told by a pigeon that Paduski and Crispi had gone to Malone's apartment. After Captain Saunders had arrived, Carter and he had used all their old M. I. experience to build a network of spies around Paduski, a network which didn't reach up into his regular men, but covered every movement of himself or any of his men. The espionage ranged from the girl in the kitchen to the garage car washer—from the landlady of the rooming house to the straight copper on the beat—and on out in the country. Carter had got the tip, passed it on, and Johnny had gone to the janitor of the building with a twenty dollar note.

Hatfield let go of Tony's throat and pushed him back. "All right," he drawled, "I'm Johnny Hatfield. Right nice of you to come to the door, Tony. It is Tony Crispi, the gun slinger, isn't it? Strut your stuff, feller."

Tony stood for a moment, as still as if carved out of marble. He was a gun-

fighter and unafraid, but he had been drinking, something he very seldom did. Ed Paduski had forced one or two on him, which was another sign of Paduski's slipping. Heretofore a drink taken by one of his men while on duty would have meant instant dismissal, if not worse.

As Johnny's words reached Crispi's brain and he realized what he was up against, his eyes cleared of surprise and he became what he was, a fast, nerveless gun-fighter working at his trade. He saw the man standing before him with nothing in his hand and with no indication in his eyes or in the tenseness of his muscle of drawing.

TONY'S left arm went out at a sharp angle—and he drew his automatic from his coat pocket with his right hand at the same time. It was fast, and the play was to have the other man's eyes follow the left hand for a split second, which would mean the edge on a draw.

But Tony was up against a gun-fighter whose eyes followed nothing but remained staring coldly into the man in front of him. As Tony's hand went into his pocket, Johnny Hatfield's hand went under his left arm, and before Tony could get his automatic half out, a bullet struck him between the eyes. As he fell, Johnny stepped to the door, opened it and called, "I just got Crispi, Ed! You're next. Johnny Hatfield talking." He closed the door and ran down the hall, down the stairs to the next landing and out.

Ed Paduski and Malone had kept on talking when Tony went to the door. They had not heard anything until they heard the shot, and Johnny's yell.

They both jumped up, drew their guns and ran to the hall, opened the

door and out, almost falling over the body of the man who had said not five minutes before that as soon as he got his eyes on Johnny Hatfield he was going to kill him. The voice that had told Paduski "You're next" was still echoing in Paduski's brain.

Jerry Malone was a gambler, a cold-blooded crook, and a killer, but even he was shaken. The fact that Hatfield had appeared, killed Crispi, and got away, at the very time he and Paduski had been framing to get him, seemed to the suspicious Irishman like an omen of evil.

To Paduski it seemed to be an inexorable fate, closing in on him. Like all Slavs, he was deeply superstitious, and now he went to pieces. Five of his best men gone; that "You're next" had got him.

He stood looking down at the body of Tony, his gun in his hand.

"Snap out of it!" commanded Malone. "The cops will be here any minute. Come in and—"

"Come, hell," snarled Paduski. "I'm going to get my mob and hunt for that devil until I find him. Nothing else goes with me."

He put his gun back in his pocket and walked steadily to the stairs and down them without a word.

"Well, you crazy fool!" said Malone after him. "I guess I'll go north after all."

Ed Paduski got in his car, slowly turned around and drove through Detroit just as slowly. The one thought in his mind was to get his men and then get Hatfield.

He drove out to the house in the country, and when he arrived he sent the two men there back into Detroit with instructions to get together by midnight all men who worked for him. Then he went upstairs to Rita.

"What brings you back so soon?" she asked.

"Tony just got knocked off by Hatfield. Why the hell he came in after me I don't know," he answered shortly, going to a chest of drawers. "What's that water running?"

"Better lay off that stuff," she said lazily. "I'm going to take a hot bath. Well, if Tony is gone it's about time we pulled, Ed."

"Like hell," he snarled, as he took a small package from the drawer. "You can pull whenever you want to. I'm going to get that rat."

"And first you're going to take a sleigh-ride," she sneered as she passed him, heading for the bathroom.

"I'm going to meet the bunch at Sam Adams's in a couple of hours," he answered, opening the package. "Take your bath, Rita, then we'll dope things out."

SHE heard him moving around the room, restless as a caged animal, then she heard him laugh, the cruel, mirthless laugh of a snowbird "on the habit." She heard him and straightened up in the tinted porcelain tub, her face white. For the first time in months she had left her knife in plain sight on her dresser. If that was what he laughed about she was in as much danger as if shut up with a black jaguar.

Her nerve was flawless, though, and she got out of the tub, carefully dried herself, put on a silk bathrobe and furtipped slippers, then came out into the room, her right hand in the pocket of the bathrobe, as poised as a trainer going into a wild beast's cage.

One look at Paduski and she knew that he had found her knife and that the cocaine he had taken in double quantity had made him forget all fear.

"I have another knife in my pocket, Ed," she said softly as he advanced on her.

"I'll teach you to try and run my mob!" he snarled. "I think you're doing the tipping, damn you!"

When he said that she knew she had lost, and she turned to run back to the bathroom.

Paduski caught her before she had gone two feet. She fought him silently, but when he finally let go her arm she fell to the floor a broken and bloody thing.

He stood a moment, looking down on the woman who had taken care of him many times, a sneer on his face. "Get the hell out of here before I come back or I'll finish the job, you—" Then he went into the bathroom, washed his hands, put the little package of cocaine in his pocket and went out without another look at what was on the floor.

As the door closed behind him, Rita raised her head and started to crawl slowly along toward the dresser on the left.

CHAPTER XI.

FOR JUSTICE.

"SEE," Tommy triumphed as he and Mase crept cautiously up to the rear of Paduski's house in the gray dawn. "No one home, I bet you. Wait till I take a look in the cookee's window."

He eased up to a window off the kitchen and looked in. "The beds haven't been slept in," he announced. "Bet that old devil's out on a bat. Come on, Mase."

"Better look in the garages," suggested Mase.

"Aw, can't you see the doors are

wide open. I know this dump, I tell you. There would be light on and cars here. Only man that's here is the bartender, and he goes to bed drunk every morning; he may be out at that."

They went softly in and crept along the hall. In spite of Tommy's boasts, the only thing he ever had done was to drive a hot car. The time he drove Mike O'Neill and the other killers he had only been used because the regular driver couldn't be located.

"Where is the stuff?" asked Mase as they tiptoed along the hall of the lower floor.

"Down between two slabs of concrete, under the stairs that lead into the pit."

"What kind of pit?"

"Aw, just a room dug out down there. Where an old furnace used to be. What's that?" Tommy's gun came out and up; so did Mason Barnes's.

From the top of the stairs came a broken, gurgling whimper like that of a sorely hurt animal trying to get to its den.

"My God," whispered Tommy. "What is it?"

"Throw your flash up," commanded Mase, who was made of sterner stuff. "Some one hurt. Come on, Tommy; show me some nerve."

Together they went slowly up the stairs, Tommy's flash light playing ahead of them. When they got to the top one they saw what it was that was making the noise. It was Rita Paduski, on the floor near the stairs, crawling slowly along, looking like a broken butterfly in her gay silken bathrobe that was splashed with blood. In her right hand was tightly clenched the long knife she had forgotten to take with her when she needed it most.

"Who—is—it?" she mumbled, raising her head.

She could not see out of her bruised and blackened eyes.

The two boys stopped.

"It's Tommy, Rita. What?"

"Not now," commanded Mase. "We got to get her somewhere. She's been—"

"You—Tommy? Who—is that—with you?"

"A friend of mine from Canada, Rita. We'll take care of you and—"

"Ed—has done that—already. Lift me—to the bed—"

She fainted as Tommy and Mase gently as they could, picked her up in their strong young arms and carried her back into the room.

Tommy looked around in horror as they laid her on the satin-quilted bed. "There must have been a regular battle in here."

"Get some cold water and some towels," ordered Mase, who, born and raised in the Kentucky hills, had seen and helped plenty of hurt people.

He went to the table, poured out a stiff drink of brandy and forced some of it between the woman's cut lips.

FIVE minutes later Rita tried to sit up, but couldn't. She fell back and lay there staring up in Tommy's sorrowful, wet, boyish face. The young man who had wanted to be "a proud and hostile guy" was openly crying. Beside him was Mase, his eyes wet, but his lips in a thin, tight line and his face grim.

"Don't cry—Tommy. Get me—me another drink—then two of those powders in—the top drawer."

For the first and the last time in her evil, but gamely lived existence, Rita Paduski was going to take a "shot." She had taken the stuff away from Paduski many times and there was plenty around the room in different places.

They got her the drink and the powders, and gravely watched her while she took them, first the big drink, then the deliberate double sniff of cocaine.

She had been held up in Tommy's arms while doing it. Both of them, Tommy and Mase, had forgotten all about the chances of any one coming.

The powerful, uncut brandy and the drug could not heal the broken body, but they could and did give her fighting spirit respite from pain, and allowed her brain to think clearly.

"Put the pillows behind me, Tommy, and let me down on them; that's it." She could see a little after Mase's gentle and not unskillful washing away of clotted blood. "Who is—this boy?"

"He's Mase Dooflicker, Rita," answered Tommy. "My buddy. He's a right guy, Rita. Used to work for Jerry Malone. He's one of the guys that shot it out with Mike and the rest. Hadn't I better go for a doctor? Mase will stay here."

"Yes, suh, you bet, I'll stay."

"A doctor can't do me any good, Tommy. I'm going away in a few minutes. Let me do the talking, Tommy." The green-gray eyes opened as far as they could, and she looked straight at Mase. The cocaine and the brandy had taken firm hold now, and her brain was clear.

She had lived hard; she had heard men ordered to go and kill; she had played the game as she wanted to—and now it all come to one thing more. It was what had let her live, crawling down a long hall with a knife in her hand. She wanted to see Ed Paduski's evil soul stand with hers before the Judgment seat, and she wanted to know that she had "got" him. That was all her brain could hold now. No loyalty, no love; nothing but the determination to get Ed before she died.

"You," she said, her eyes still on Mase, "are a Federal agent." She knew that "the guys that shot it out with Mike and the rest" were no men of Malone's.

"Aw, Rita, please let me get a doctor," pleaded Tommy. "Now you're going bats and—"

"Tommy, keep still. You are, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered Mason Barnes simply. "I am a Federal agent. Go on from there." Right there Mason Barnes showed a flash of the understanding and mental ability that some years later made him chief of his service.

Tommy started to rise. "Sit down, Tommy," Mase said quietly. "Rita wants us to do something."

The lips tried to smile as she said: "You—if you live, will be a—some woman will—" The pain was creeping back. "Get me some more brandy, Tommy, quick."

"YOU want my gun?" demanded Tommy bitterly as he rose.

"What do I want your gun for?" asked Mase calmly. "I don't know you, feller. I never saw you before I picked you up and deputized you to help me. Get that brandy, quick."

Tommy drew a long breath and his eyes almost popped out of his head, but he didn't say anything as he poured out the brandy.

Rita managed a twisted smile. "Listen; don't talk," she said, as Tommy put the glass to her lips. Then, after she had rested a minute: "The damn snow is getting me. Ed Paduski is at Sam Adams's place on the riverfront. Ed ordered all those Federal men put—on the spot. Will you kill him now?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mase simply. "I'll go get Johnny Hatfield right away and—"

Rita really laughed, a cracked, discordant laugh that brought blood to her lips.

"Hatfield a Federal agent? Go get him, quick. He will—kill this—this beast that—" Her head went gently back to the pillow and she died, a smile on her lips and in her eyes.

"She's gone away," said Mase softly. He went over to a couch and picked up an ornate bathrobe and brought it back, covering the body that at least had held a fighting spirit.

He opened a window wide with some idea of letting the fresh, clean air from the lake blow over her. Then they tiptoed out, leaving her covered with the bathrobe of the man who had manhandled her to her death.

Once clear of the house Tommy stopped as they walked toward the car. "Go on, why don't you?" he said, trying hard to be hostile and proud, but not quite making it. "Put the bracelets on me and see if I care. I know it's all bunk, what you said about me being a—about your deputizing me. Why don't you get the stones and take me in?"

"Oh, for Pete's sake," almost shouted Mase, who was more shaken than he would have admitted. He had killed in gun-fights, as young as he was, but he had never seen a woman die, and he felt sick within. "Damn the stones and you, too, feller. I keep tellin' you I never saw you before. I'm sorry I picked you up to help me. I would take you into Detroit and make you go all the way through with me, but I just thought that some lads in there might not like to see you. I un-deputize you. Get the hell out of here. I'll use your car and leave it for you in Sarnia. I'll catch hell for doing—"

"You can have the car," said Tommy, firmly. "I'm done with cars and

hot stuff, no foolin'. I won't need a car to get back to Hamilton; there's plenty of busses. I never saw you either and I wouldn't know you for a million bucks."

"Go on then," answered Mase, "I'm—say, listen, on the way back you won't do any telephoning, will you?"

"Me? Who to? I'm done, feller. I'm going to get me my job back, I tell you."

Tommy walked away, leaving Mase a little undecided. He hadn't thought about Tommy's tipping off. Then he laughed, being young and reckless and disposed to place things on the knees of the nine Red Gods, a weakness which he got bravely over in later years. He had decided to trust Tommy.

As he drove out of the yard, Tommy called from the shelter of the trees: "So long, Mase Dooflicker. Much obliged. I got clam blood in me, old kid."

CHAPTER XII.

RAIDERS' LUCK.

MASE drove into Detroit and went straight to the hospital where he had been told in Sarnia that Billy Harden was. He had to act quickly, so he told who he was and got up to Harden's room without any trouble. Carter was there with Billy. He would get information and tell it to Billy, who relayed it by a newly appointed night nurse to Johnny Hatfield, at a quiet little hotel out of the business section.

Mase told them what had happened, and half an hour later Billy Harden was out of the hospital, sitting in a car with Captain Saunders, Johnny Hatfield, Carter, and United States Deputy

Marshals Beardsley and Absolom. Mase and three more deputy marshals were ahead in another car. Billy could have left the hospital any time a week before and now was, as he boasted, "better than ever."

As the cars came close in to Adams's place, the men got out. They all had their instructions. There had been no time to get search warrants. It was almost seven o'clock in the morning and the chances were already against finding Paduski there. He was a secondary thing. What Captain Saunders wanted was the man who was sending the Federal agents to their death.

There were only a few working men on the street and they paid no attention to the little group.

Mase eased over by Johnny Hatfield and told him what he had done with Tommy. In telling Captain Saunders about the whole thing he had not mentioned what had become of Tommy, and much to his surprise neither the captain nor Johnny had asked.

"I turned him loose, Johnny," said Mase, his face white. He didn't know just what was going to happen to him, but he was coming clean.

"Was he under arrest?" demanded Johnny, sternly, as they started to walk toward Adams's place.

"No, I never put him under arrest, but—"

"Listen," interrupted Johnny. "If he wasn't under arrest he wasn't a prisoner. We got too much to think about without hearing a lot of wah-wah from you about some one you knew some time that helped you or didn't. Forget it and attend to business." His tone was stern, but his eyes were smiling. "That's Captain Saunders's ruling, young feller."

"Dog-gone," said the much relieved Mase, "that's sure a fine rule."

Almost at the door Captain Saunders said curtly: "Get around the back, Mase, you and Harden. Hatfield, you and Carter come with me. Beardsley, you and Absolom get to either side of this door, and no one is to come out of it," then he added grimly, "or in it, either, no matter who it may be. The rest of you come in with us."

PADUSKI was still in Adams's place; so was Jerry Malone. The three were in a back room still going over plans. Malone was pulling out of the combine and there was much to be straightened out.

Just outside the door, which was shut but not locked, loafed three of Paduski's men who had been ordered to wait for him, after the rest had gone; and two men of Jerry Malone's crew.

As the front door crashed open under the combined assault of three shoulders, and the sound of running feet came through the empty barroom, the five men stood up and drew their guns.

There was a swirl of shots as the three men, Saunders, Carter and Hatfield came in the room. The five men were gangsters, but not the type of the Chi Kid or Rocca. They shot, but they were confronted with three dead shots whose guns belched out death, fast and merciless.

When the firing ceased, Detective Lieutenant Carter was down with a bullet high up in his leg, and another in his right shoulder. Saunders and Hatfield, the latter with a red burn made by a bullet across his cheek, stepped over the bodies of the gangsters who had died at their posts, followed by the three deputies.

As the shooting started, Paduski, Malone and Adams all jumped to their feet. They had no way of knowing

just what it was, a raid by the police or by a rival gang or what.

"Out the window," commanded Adams, a tall, well-built man with a curiously stiff pink-and-white face. "Out, both of you; I'll handle it."

Ed Paduski, with the now ever-present fear of Hatfield in his heart, obeyed the order and jumped from the window near which he had been sitting. It was only five feet to the ground and he lit on his feet. His car was parked down the alley about thirty feet away.

As he ran toward it, Mase and Billy Harden came through a hole in the fence above the place and about a hundred feet from Paduski. They had found difficulty in getting around to the rear, owing to tumble-down shacks and blind areaways.

They both halted and as Paduski jumped into his car, they opened fire. He did not even turn to answer it, but started his car, crouching low. As he did, two bullets tore into him, but neither in a fatal spot, hitting his shoulder and left arm high up. Just as Mase and Billy ran forward, a truck pulled out of a garage between them and Paduski's car, and when they could win clear, he was gone. They both stood there and cursed the unfortunate truck driver who was honestly going to work.

Inside the room, Adams and Malone stood, both with guns in their hands. The door swung wide and Saunders and Hatfield stepped in; at the same moment Mase and Billy Harden stuck their heads through the window, with their guns in front of the heads. The deputies filled the doorway.

"Government business!" shouted Saunders. "Put 'em up."

"Like hell!" jeered Malone, who was a fighter from the top of his head to the tips of his toes. "You macks can't run that sandy on me." He raised

his gun. Mase Barnes killed him with a single shot from the window.

As he fell, Adams dropped the gun, but did not raise his hands. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, not a muscle of his face moving. The voice came from between set lips. As he spoke Carter came staggering in. Adams saw him and went on: "Oh, police business! You'll be broke for this, Carter."

"You're under arrest," said Saunders, curtly, "and—"

"On what charge? And where is your warrant? You say government business. Show me your credentials." Adams walked up to Saunders and stood within a foot of him.

CAPTAIN JAMES NORCROSS SAUNDERS stood and looked at the set, pink-and-white face that was so close to his own. Only the eyes showed life, and they seemed to be taunting him.

Then, as swiftly as a cobra strikes, he smashed up at the face, with the muzzle of his gun acting like a rake. Up and across; and the cheeks, cheek bones and nose seemed to fall away before the tearing gun muzzle and sights, leaving a horribly mutilated caricature of a face.

The man screamed in agony and staggered back, both hands going to the face, or what had been a face. Captain Saunders, his own lips curled up in a snarl that showed his teeth, dropped his gun and sprang like the recoil of a spring, straight at the man's throat.

His eyes blazed like a tiger crouching to kill and as his hands closed around the man's throat he snarled: "Not Sam Adams—not Sam Adams, but—" He went to the floor on top of the man who had given under the

attack as a tree gives before a typhoon. "Adam Roberts! You kill my—" his hands tightened around the neck and the already distorted face began to turn black.

Johnny Hatfield walked up, stooped and gripped Saunders by the shoulder. "Captain Saunders," he said, distinctly, "you are killing that man without giving him a chance. You, an officer and a gentleman, are choking a prisoner to death."

It reached Saunders's brain, that "officer and a gentleman," and his hands relaxed. He stood, dragging the man up with him. His eyes became sane, but his lips still held the smile of death and curled over his teeth.

"This cur, lower than the lowest in hell," he said, calmly enough, "sent four of my men to their death. Men that he should have protected with his life."

He half held, half pushed the man to the wall, then stood back, holding him against it. "Roberts," he commanded, his voice a rasp, "Tell me. How did you do it? Tell me! Roberts, come back and tell me how you did it!"

From the mutilated face, still purple and black, came a voice, as if from a distance, calm, cold and silvery. It was as if a spirit was speaking through a mask. "I watched trains and hotels. Most of them came here to get in with Paduski or Malone. I—hate—you all, damn you. I spotted them—one by one; and now—" The head fell forward. His disloyal, always crooked heart, weakened by drugs and constant dissipation, had stopped beating.

Captain Saunders let the body drop to the floor and straightened to attention, his heels together, his head up. "I am in command of this party," he said coldly. "Hatfield, Barnes, Harden, come with me. The rest of you

stay here until relieved by the United States Marshal."

He drove, Hatfield sitting beside him. The miles flowed under the powerful car. Twice motorcycle policemen drew up alongside, to fall back as Captain Saunders held out a hand in which glistened a badge, and snapped curtly: "Federal agents."

AS they cleared Detroit and got out into the country, Captain Saunders began talking, looking straight ahead at the road always.

"There was once a man named Adam Roberts, who came into the service through some political influence. He was not in the Treasury Department, but in one that is supposed to—oh, hell, never mind that part. This man, Roberts, went bad. He was shielded by his backing, and got transferred; then was transferred again. Then an agent was killed—and this man was present. He claimed he drew his gun, but was disarmed. Then he was sent to cover a man—and this man was found dead, as my boys were found dead. Finally, he was trapped, and I was sent to bring him in. He learned of the trap, and arranged another. We walked into it, and men were again killed. He knew he was exposed then, and came into the open. He laughed as he saw the men of the same service on the ground dead.

"I was wounded and on the ground also, but I got up and I was given strength enough to smash his leering face with the butt of my Colt; not the barrel, but the butt. I had time to see his right hand flash up. He had taken a bullet through it, but it came up to protect his face. That is what I saw first to-night—the scar on the back of his hand; then his eyes told me the rest. He must have gone to a face

specialist and had a face built. That is the reason that none of the men knew him. His department worked in and with all others. He knew a hundred different agents where another man would only know his unit.

"That is all, Hatfield. I am a captain. I rated higher in France. I am an officer and I am a gentleman, but will you believe me when I say coldly and in full command of my faculties, that I wish by all that's holy that I had continued choking him to death?"

"I believe you," answered Johnny, simply. "You could have, captain, and still remained an officer and a gentleman. Knowing what you know, I would have done the same."

"We turn here," said Mase.

Saunders turned and began to run more slowly. "Johnny," he said, finally, "you have made me feel as if I had been judged and given back my—" the hard-bitten fighting man smiled at the lean, browned Kentuckian—"honor," he finished, softly.

Just then Mase said: "It's that house on the right, over in the woods."

ED PADUSKI, wounded in two places, had been able to stanch the flow of blood and drive back. He left his car in front and walked slowly across the veranda and in. His one thought was to get his jewels and then get over the line to a doctor.

As he started across the big empty front room, he stopped by the stairs. A sound had come from upstairs. It was a brush that the wind, now blowing up quite a gale, had pushed from the dressing table near the window that Mase and Tommy had opened.

Paduski heard it. "What?" he snarled. "Ain't you had enough, damn you? I'll come up and give you some

more, you knife artist." He walked slowly up the stairs, holding on to the banister, his crazed brain forgetting the fortune in jewels that he had come for. Now his thought was of the woman he thought was upstairs. As he climbed, he was snarling out loud.

When he reached the top, the climb had opened the holes in his arm and shoulder, but he kept steadily on. Finally he stood by the side of the bed. "Stalling, hey?" he said, with a smile. "Come on, get up and take your beating!" He jerked the bathrobe off and saw her face, with the set smile on the lips.

He backed away, his eyes still on it; then he whirled around to face Billy Harden in the doorway.

Billy had begged so hard to go up alone that Saunders had finally allowed him the privilege. They had reached the house shortly after Paduski, owing to Saunders's fast driving. Mase and Johnny Hatfield found the jewels during the time Billy Harden was upstairs, and they went into the proper department to help pay Uncle Sam's expenses.

"Who the hell are you?" Paduski began when Billy interrupted him.

"Draw a gun—woman-killer!"

Ed Paduski backed away for a step, his face white, then obeyed the order. His gun came into sight, to be shot out of his hand. Before he could even clutch the mangled hand, Billy Harden followed the bullet; and the barrel of his Colt beat Ed Paduski down; not dead, but alive enough to stand trial, to get a life sentence and live for ten years, a scarred, cringing wreck, afraid of everything, in a torment like that of the lowest hell, deprived of his drugs. Always wherever his eyes looked, he saw the face of Rita as she smiled up at him the last time.



"So you dare disobey me!"

The Snow Girl

Queen of a mysterious Antarctic kingdom, Naina threatens the intrepid polar flyers Dragon and Welch with her coldly implacable power

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE WELCH, who is telling the story, is radio man at the Trans-polar air line's station a few hundred miles from the South Pole, in 1960. He and David Dragon go out in a blizzard to hunt for a special War Department plane.

They are seized by Antarctic bandits armed with a strange blue light-ray, and taken with Helga Johnson, from the wrecked plane, to the distant village of the bandits.

The bandits are renegades who had been assembled by the "White Chief-

tain," one Roberts, who had passed on his hatred of the United States to his daughter Naina. Upon his death she succeeded to the rule over the bandits and a thousand or more Antarctic natives. With her blue ray, which creates terrible "blue blizzards," she plans to wipe out the American polar colonies, such as Byrd's Little America.

At the city inside the cliff, Helga finds her lost father, inventor of the blue ray, who had been captured from an exploring party by Naina's father.

Ramón Margones, a Chilean pirate

This story began in the *Argosy* for November 2.

who is secretly seeking the gold in the mountains of Antarctica, takes Joe and David Dragon before the ruler, Naina.

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCESS OF ANTARCTICA.

SHE lay upon her couch in a white robe diaphanous as though the cold could not touch her. The couch was of a soft white fabric, with pillows of blue-white, smooth as velvet. It stood upon a small, upraised stone platform. A pale-blue canopy was over it; a soft illumination of blue-white light fell upon the reclining figure, and on trappings that might have graced the throne-room of a fabled Oriental princess.

She raised herself indolently on one elbow as we entered. Margones pushed us forward. He knelt at the steps of the dais, but David and I stood erect, staring. Vision of girlhood, inconceivably beautiful! As Helga Johnson's father had said, she was no more than a girl, this Naina. Twenty years old at the most. A girl, slim but rounded into maturity.

Yet as I stared, and she stared indolently back at us, she seemed unreal. A statue of ice. But not that either, for through the filmy draperies her figure gleamed like cold pink marble. Long, pale-golden hair lay in frozen waves on her breast. A face, chiseled by a sculptor of divine genius into a beauty incredibly perfect.

The illusion broke. She moved the pink marble of her limbs. A flush of deeper red came to her cheeks. Her sensuous lips parted; her eyes, pale-blue, narrowed, and darkened until they were almost black.

No statue of ice this, but a human girl, hot with anger.

She spoke; a sharp, imperious question. "You do not kneel?"

I said, "No. Should we? Sorry."

I plucked at David. He was standing drawn to his full height. He had thrown back his hood. His lips were parted with fast-surgings breath. Young giant, perfection of youthful strength and rugged masculine beauty. He stood gazing with his soul in his eyes, emotion-swept, oblivious of himself. At his sides his great fists were clenched, as though subconsciously he felt that this vision of imperious beauty were a challenge to his manhood.

"David!" I twitched his sleeve. "David, kneel down!"

We knelt together on the step, but David's head was up, and his gaze unwavering.

Naina gestured with a slim, pink-white arm. We stood up.

She said:

"Leave them with me, Margones. Wait outside my door. I will call when I want you."

The bandit turned and went out of the room. He was grinning as though amused at this girl ruler whose whims he was humoring for his own purposes. We sat, as Naina commanded, on the steps at her feet. She had not moved; she still reclined on one elbow, propped by the blue-white cushions, regarding us contemplatively. David was nearest to her, within reach of her hand.

She said, and now her anger was gone and she spoke quietly:

"I put you with Johnson. No doubt he told you my plans."

I hesitated. David said, "Yes, he did."

"Quite so. To save me words. This is the time for action, not words. That little girl who in her radio messages signed herself Helga Johnson—that is his daughter?"

"Yes," said David again.

"I thought so."

SHE regarded David impersonally. "You stare at me?" A glint of amusement came into the blue depths of her eyes. "You have the weakness of all men."

Contempt was in her voice—contempt for this passion of men which made woman's beauty a thing of allure. Contempt for love, so remote from her whom obviously it had never touched.

David said abruptly, "What do you want with us?"

She raised her eyebrows. "That little girl Helga knows too much about my blue ray weapons. I shall keep her here as I have kept her father. I was going to send you to Little America, to tell them what they must do."

Her eyes darkened again; upon her whole face lay the dark shadow of her hatred. "Your United States!" She said it with a breathless, smoldering passion. "I have had enough of your nation's insolence. This is my land, not yours."

She checked herself suddenly. "You keep on staring at me, David Dragon! I think now I will not send you with my message, but keep you here with me."

At David's expression, she repeated, "Keep you here with me. Is that so terrible a fate? I will treat you kindly. You will learn to serve me, to be loyal, to love Antarctica and me."

It seemed that David started; I saw that his fists were still clenched. On Naina's face there was a fleeting, sardonic look of amusement.

"Oh. Yes," said David at last, "I see."

Naina added contemplatively as though he had not spoken:

"I think that this little red-headed fellow can take my message. I am go-

ing to send you to tell them that they must abandon Little America. Leave it—get out of here, out of my country. You seem intelligent, Joe Welch."

I retorted, "Too intelligent to take any message like that. You don't know what you—"

Her smile stopped me. She made no gesture. A smile of such calm, cold confidence that it seemed almost incredible.

"Perhaps they will be more intelligent than you. If they yield at once, it would spare them tragedy. I won't have them here!"

The calmness of her voice suddenly broke. "My—my father hated them. I hate them—I won't have them here! You think, and they think, because they are a big, powerful nation that they can defy me. Because I am only the daughter of the White Bandit. They shall see I am more than that. Ruler of Antarctica—and they're on my land. I've had enough of their insolence, you understand?"

It was a wild, half-hysterical outburst. From a man, one would have thought it irrational; but from this girl, knowing what we knew of her—it was, as Johnson had said, a little pathetic. David stood silently staring. I said gently:

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'm going to take you in my airplane to Little America. I will circle overhead and send you down in a volplane. You will tell them that they must darken all their lights as a signal to me that they have yielded. I want them then to abandon the settlement—to leave Antarctica and the stations on the overland trail. I want them all abandoned. I won't have your planes flying over my country."

"Suppose they won't agree to do all that?" I suggested.

"Then I will kill them, drive them out. Just because they are a big nation and I am small, I won't tolerate their insolence!"

I THINK that in spite of myself, there may have been amusement in my eyes. Or perhaps it was pity. Whatever it was, I think that she saw it. And there must have sprung within her the desire to show us her power. She called suddenly:

"Margones!"

He stood in the doorway behind us.

"*Señorita?*"

"That fellow who disobeyed me yesterday, and whom I promised punishment—have they brought him?"

"I think so, *señorita*. I will see."

Margones bowed with a graceful, sweeping gesture. His ironic eyes met mine; and I felt it was he whom we had to fear, far more than this headstrong girl. He said deferentially,

"May I suggest a thing, *señorita?*"

"What is it? Speak out."

"I have heard what you say to these Americanos. I think I would not make war upon these Yankee pigs—not just now. There is a thing better that we can do." He ignored her flush of anger. "May I lock them up now and talk to you, alone?"

She repeated impatiently, "What is it? They can hear—I have nothing to hide."

"True," he said. "Well, it is this. I think that this girl Helga Johnson is very important in Washington. If you send this Joe Welch to Little America to tell them we are holding her here, that we will kill her unless they send us much gold, it might be arranged, *señorita*. She is official in Washington, you told me so. She does the government work. If we tell them that the White Bandit is holding her, they per-

haps pay the ransom. A good ransom, in gold—and food and equipment also. Then if as you say she is dangerous to you, we kill her just the same, and make war upon the Yankees."

She demanded calmly, "Gold? What use have I for gold?"

"It is very nice to have, *señorita*."

He bowed again, and flung David and me his ironic glance. "If we demand both food and gold, you and your people take the food—and me and my men, yes, we are satisfied with the gold."

She waved him away. "You annoy me with such plans. I will ask nothing of the Americans. Bring me that disobedient fellow for his punishment."

Margones assented. "*Sí, señorita*; I obey."

He left us. Swift thoughts leaped at me. We were alone, here in this cave room. Its white draperies of fabric shrouded windows quite near us. They were open. I glanced at one out of the tail of my eye. It seemed that we were perhaps thirty feet above the level of the cavern floor outside. Swift thoughts. If we could escape from here—

Naina moved. She sat up abruptly. Her feet came from the couch to the step beside us, feet of pink-white marble, incased in sandals. The soft fabric of her robe brushed me, and I became aware of a perfume from it—a perfume which had all this time enveloped us, but was now more intense. A wave of it flowed out, exotically alluring; yet I knew that a little more might steal my senses. In her hand, as it hung idly at her side, was a small white cylinder. A perceptible cold radiated from it.

She said quietly, "You think you might escape from me? Don't try it." She added, after a moment of silence,

"I will show you what punishment is—what comes to those who dare disobey me.

"My people love me; but they know I am master. I treat them kindly when they do right, and I bring swift justice to those who do wrong. Ah, you have him, Margones?"

THE bandit had already returned. There was a commotion at the door. Several Antarticans stood there waiting as Margones brought in the culprit.

Naina commanded, "Stand away, you two. You shall see now how my father taught me to rule."

I drew David aside; he was still standing staring, as though fascinated. Margones came toward us, pushing a chattering, terrified wretch before him, a small, slender Antartican native man. He wore trousers of animal skin; from the waist up he was stripped. When Margones released him he fell to the floor. Naina drew herself to her full height, gazing down imperiously upon him as he groveled at her feet. He chattered, mumbling in the native language.

"Speak English," she commanded. "I want these Americans to hear you, to see how I treat those who disobey me."

"Princess, have mercy!"

"Did you steal one of my cylinders of the blue ray—and a rifle, and the sled and dog of Umo?"

"Princess, I did."

"And were gone with them for a day?"

"Princess, my woman she is with another child. I wanted something good for her to eat. She is sick so much. I thought if I kill an animal—"

"In the winter night?"

"I thought I might. She thought if she eat some liver— Our food is so much the same—you have given us no liver for so long, princess. My woman she sick from the seal meat now, she cannot eat like the rest of us."

"I give you all good food. You knew it was forbidden for you to leave the camp?"

"Princess, yes! But I wanted—I thought—"

"And you did leave the camp?"

"Yes, but I—"

"Enough. You broke my law. You did it knowingly. You admit that?"

"Princess, yes. But—"

"Enough. You are guilty."

She stood like a statue of ice gazing down at him. Her cold white beauty was inhuman. She seemed not angry now, but white, calm and quiet. Judicial.

I gasped, "What are you going to do?"

"Be still!" snapped Margones.

At my words Naina turned and flashed me a glance. "Punish him as I would punish you for disobedience." From the couch behind her she picked up a metal handle from which dangled a length of wire. Like a long whip she lashed it tentatively in the air.

The wretch at her feet screamed, "No, princess, no!"

Abruptly David leaped forward.

"Stand back!" rasped Naina.

But he did not. Instead, he seized her by the shoulders. There was a flurry behind us where the Antarticans stood watching in the doorway. Beside me, Margones took a step; an automatic was in his hand.

But Naina's gesture waved him off. "You!" She gasped her astonishment. David's bulk towered head and shoulders above her; she was slim and small as a child beside him.

He stood gripping her, and she gazed up into his face.

"YOU dare to touch me!" She found her voice.

Her hand upraised warned Margones back. She was rigid, blazing at David; but his grasp did not relax.

- I muttered, "David—"

But he did not heed me.

"Punish him," he said, "some other way. If you have to punish him."

- Their glances crossed like swords. And it seemed for an instant that his will was stronger.

She gasped, "You—you are hurting me."

He dropped his hands at once. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to hurt you. There's no need to punish him. He hasn't done anything wrong."

- "Hasn't he?" A fury swept her, and I knew that David had lost. "Stand away from me! Margones, take him—"

I warned sharply, "David!"

Margones and I pulled at him. He stood a head taller than either of us. As David resisted, the bandit hissed, "You fool, do you want death?"

"Easy, David!" I drew him aside. "You can't do anything."

We stood watching. Naina lashed the wire again. A current hummed in it so that it glowed with a vivid blue light.

David and I, even six feet away, could feel its stinging cold as Naina lashed it back and forth.

"Stand up!" she commanded.

But the wretch could not stand. He tried, but his shaking knees gave way. He groveled, whimpered, chattering with terror.

- And then she struck him. The wire had the sting of a steel whip; its terri-

ble cold burned his flesh like fire. He screamed, and she lashed again.

"So you would dare disobey me!" She wound it around one of his arms, held it an instant, and jerked it away. The mark of it showed on his blackened, frozen flesh.

"Princess! Mercy! Have mercy!"

"Why? Why should I?"

"Princess! *Aie*, stop!"

A white mist was swirling around us. Through it the white, beautiful figure of Naina showed like an avenging fury, lashing.

The blue fire of the whip gleamed through the mist.

"Disobedient servant!"

The fellow's screams, the hiss of the wire, the snapping radiations of the frigid air, mingled in a confusion of horror. Snow in tiny, dustlike particles was falling in the room.

David jerked away from Margones.

"Naina, stop!"

The whip caught David a glancing, stinging blow. Naina held it motionless. She fronted David. Her white breast was heaving with her exertion, but she smiled calmly.

"Stand back. You are in my way."

"No!" gasped David. "Stop this. Don't torture him."

"Stand back."

"No!" David reached for the whip. Margones was grinning. "Shall I shoot him, *señorita*?"

"No." She eyed David calmly. "You, too, would disobey me?"

"Yes. You can't do this."

"And why not?"

"Because it's—inhuman."

"Inhuman?" She laughed. "Inhuman? What is that? This is punishment, discipline. It is what you will deserve if you annoy me further."

He said slowly, "I will not let you go on with this. I tell you to stop."

Again they crossed glances. It may have been that she felt his challenge; perhaps it held a lure for her. But she stared at him calmly.

"Stand back."

"No!"

David lost again. Angry color mounted the slender white column of her throat; her eyes flashed.

"No man dares disobey me!"

"But I dare. Give me that whip."

She lashed it at David. And as he fought to take it away from her she suddenly struck him on the head with the heavy metal handle of the whip. He fell. Margones shoved the automatic against me as I started forward. "Don't move! *Dios!* What a fool is your friend!"

The Antarcticans in the doorway came rushing forward. I was seized and jerked from the room.

The last I saw was David lying there beside the groveling wretch. Margones was grinning. And Naina stood there, gazing down at David—gazing in mute surprise at what she had done.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFERENCE IN LITTLE AMERICA.

THE governor's secretary sneered. "A somewhat fantastic story, you'll admit that, eh?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"And what are we to do; believe it?"

"I don't know; I'm telling you the truth. Believe what you like."

"We're supposed to get excited over it, eh? I'm to rush to Governor Bland with this horrible news that the United States is about to be driven out of Antarctica. And he'll radio to the President, and he'll decide that we've had war declared on us and we'd bet-

ter surrender. Is that it? The Washington officials will say you're looking for personal publicity. Hope the newscasters will play you up."

I mopped my forehead. It was oppressively hot in Secretary Rankin's office in the Administration Building of Little America. Through the double windows the lights of the main street gleamed yellow on the packed snow. The time was 9 P.M. Greenwich, July 5, 1960. The governor was playing cards with some friends. My story wasn't important enough to interrupt him.

Rankin said, "To-morrow night at this time we're supposed to dim all our lights as a signal we've surrendered?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what I was told to tell you."

"And then decamp? Evacuate the city? Wouldn't that be a nice job, to rout out five thousand people in the middle of this hellish polar winter! Do what with them? March them out over the Ice Barrier?"

"I've told you all I know," I protested.

"How will this bandit's daughter know whether we dim our lights to-morrow night or not?"

"She'll be circling overhead in her aëro."

"Like you did awhile ago?" Rankin demanded sarcastically.

"Yes."

"Well, if her plane was up there to-night, our lookouts didn't see it."

He was exasperating. "Don't be a fool," I retorted. "I volplaned down, didn't I?"

The little winged board—a volplane of the old type—had brought me down from Naina's plane. I had landed alone on the Little America field. Naina had sent me at once on her

mission. The weather was propitious; the trip had taken only a few hours. There was no one on the plane whom I knew. Some were Margones's men, but most of the crew were native Ant-articans. I had not seen Helga or David again. Naina came to start me off. She assured me that David was not seriously hurt. She added:

"You may think to advise your country to try and send a warplane here against me. Don't do it! I warn you, don't!"

"Why not?" I demanded.

"It will never reach here. I will turn it back with high winds or a blizzard. And if it makes the attempt, I will kill this Helga and David, and Johnson too."

She stared at me with her smoldering eyes. "Do you believe me?"

I did indeed. And now, talking with Rankin, I suppressed my instinct to suggest that an expedition be sent to locate this bandit camp and rescue the American prisoners.

I repeated, "I volplaned down, didn't I? You don't suppose I dropped from heaven?"

He smiled at that. "I believe your story, Welch. But this weather control part stumps me. Daughter of the White Bandit, sailing over Little America tonight—all right. I have to believe it. But why didn't we see the plane?"

"Because its weather-control apparatus threw a dark-gray cloud under it like a smoke screen. You saw that cloud, didn't you?"

"Yes," he admitted. "Looked like one of those damned blue storms, but it didn't materialize."

"You saw the blue flashes? Your weather was disturbed? Crazy switching winds?"

As he nodded, I added, "Well, there is nothing mysterious in it. If poor

Blakely or any of his men were here, they'd tell you all about it. They had it with their expedition; Johnson is the only one of them left alive."

RANKIN was convinced at last. "But look here," he said, "we'll put this up to the governor. What would you advise us to do? He'll do what you say, short of taking the threat of an outlaw too seriously. Shall we get a warplane to fly down from Dunedin and try and locate this bandit camp?"

"No!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?"

I told him why.

"Well, then, we'll have to wait and see what she does to us."

"You couldn't get the warplane anyway," I said. "The red tape at Washington would hold it up two or three days."

I could imagine us trying to explain this bandit threat to the stodgy Washington officials!

Rankin said, "You're right on that. Whatever she does will happen tomorrow night. Look here, what will she do to us? A hell-raising blue blizzard? We can weather it. Listen: how will she know whether we dim our lights or not?"

"I told you she'd be overhead."

"Yes, but if she's above that liquid air cloud?"

"She might let down a television finder," I suggested.

"Has she got that apparatus, too?"

"I suppose so. Every raid of the White Bandit gave him something."

Rankin thought a moment. "Has she got a radiophone? Why don't we open communication with her?"

"She can receive," I said. "I don't know about her sending. You might try."

We tried it later that night. There was no result. "If she can receive," said Rankin, "she could certainly go to the nearest cache and answer us."

In the old days, I have read, in the Cordilleras between Chile and the Argentine, there were little houses built on the mountain trails. A sort of "travelers' rest." The idea had been adopted in modernized fashion here in Antarctica. In many parts of the different colonies, and in the unclaimed regions, stone shelters were erected. Food and fuel were cached in them; and there was always a radiophone. It often got out of working order; and the White Bandit, no doubt, or other bands of the nomadic natives, had systematically taken the supplies from some of them. But there were still many such caches, "shelter stations" for any one in distress, located in the isolated mountain sections.

"You suppose there's one near this bandit camp?" Rankin asked. "Just where is the bandit camp?"

I could not tell him that, beyond that it was supposed to be within a few hundred miles of the Chilean colonial city of Santiago Pequeño.

We argued all that evening. The governor, when we went to him, was interested and frankly skeptical.

"It sounds as though you were inclined to exaggeration, Welch—not to say hysteria. But I'll admit your story weaves into the known facts."

"What are the known facts?" I asked.

The governor laid a sheaf of official radio reports before us on his desk.

"Here are the real facts, officially speaking. The Bureau of Meteorology plane that was bringing Helga Johnson south ran into a blizzard, night of July 3. It fell on the trail at the fifth beacon north of your Plateau Station. The

bodies of its crew were found, frozen, by a party from the Plateau Station on July 4. That was yesterday. Frozen bodies, you understand; not murdered as you said."

I RECALLED what Johnson had told us: the blue ray froze the bodies of its victims.

"But Helga Johnson," I demanded. "Her body wasn't found?"

"No. She's missing; they haven't found her."

"What about the rescue party my station sent out in the blizzard the night of the 3rd? The one I was with. And David Dragon?"

"It came to grief. The men were found dead, not murdered. Dead, frozen." His face was solemn. The horror of all this was getting to him now; I could see that. He added, "I'm giving you what the official radio reports say. I'll admit, Welch, there's something damn queer about all this."

"Queer? What about Dragon and me?"

"Listed as missing." He shuffled the flimsies. "Your station, Welch, is operating normally. The tank-sled was brought in. Some of your dogs found their way back. The Meteorological Bureau's plane was found to be unharmed. Your boys flew it to the Plateau Station when the storm let up as it did shortly after the tragedy. Rollins is in charge since Dragon was lost. Clarke is sending thirty men from here in Little America to replace the deaths."

He shoved the papers aside. "I'll report to Washington what you say, and if this bandit's daughter or whatever she is makes any demonstration against us, why, that will be something tangible. Something to corroborate your story."

A gray-haired, rugged-faced, dignified old fellow, this Governor Bland. In his day he had been a fighter, used to the wild places of the earth. He smiled at me.

"In a few days, Welch—if there is any demonstration against us—Washington will send a warplane or two for the purpose of quelling what they'll call the 'native uprising.' Meanwhile," he shrugged, "as you doubtless know, beyond the automatics of the city police, and a few miscellaneous arms, the great United States in Colonial Antarctica is in a total state of unpreparedness."

"If the weather is bad," Rankin suggested, "this bandit won't be able to get here in that plane. It couldn't fly in a blizzard. Or could it, Welch?"

There was a touch of sarcasm in his question. I retorted, "Suit yourself. It's no different from any other plane except it's old-fashioned; but it has Johnson's weather-control mechanism."

"Well," said the governor, "I'll get off my report. We'll hope for bad enough weather to keep them away. And when the warplanes come, if the weather isn't too bad for them to get down, we'll see what we can do toward handling this bandit. I believe your story, strange as it sounds, Welch. We'll have to make some plans for releasing these prisoners. You can't tolerate American citizens being held by bandits, you know."

But the weather wasn't bad; on the contrary, it turned, for Antarctica, exceedingly good. July 6, 9 P.M. Greenwich time, approached. It was calm, quiet, with a low temperature not unpleasant; a moonless sky, with the stars blazing gems such as only the heights of Antarctica can reveal.

There is a small tower projecting

above the roof of the Administration Building in Little America, a circular room set with many windows. In it, as the hour approached when Naina had ordered us to dim our lights, Governor Bland, Rankin and I sat together waiting. And at five minutes after nine the blue blizzard began.

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN INEXPLICABLE.

MEANWHILE, in Naina's camp, David came to his senses to find himself lying on a couch in a cell-like cave room, with Naina bending over him. He was confused at first; he could not remember what had happened. But here, close over him, was the vision of beautiful girlhood. He felt the warmth of her against him.

"Naina."

He murmured it. He stirred. Instinctively his arms went out to clasp her. But as he moved, she drew away.

"So you are not dead, David Dragon?"

She was smiling her imperious, ironic smile. David's head was clearing; his senses clarifying. But there remained with him the confused memory of her face as he had seen it when first he opened his eyes. A tenderness? Or a fear upon it—a horror as she sat bending over him, thinking perhaps that she had killed him?

Whatever it was, it had vanished. She repeated calmly:

"I thought you might be dying. Margones said not, and he is more experienced with men who have been struck upon the head than I."

David sat up. There was a lump on his head, and blood matting his hair. But it seemed only a scalp wound. He smiled, "I guess I'm all right."

He felt stronger in a moment; he sat back against the stone wall which was behind the couch.

"Where are Joe and Helga? How long have I been unconscious?"

"Not long. Margones carried you here. I have sent Joe Welch to Little America."

She sat at the end of the couch, calmly regarding David. "You made me angry—I did not exactly mean to punish you in such a way."

"Thanks," said David dryly. "What are you going to do to me next?"

He saw that there were no windows in the room. The door was partly opened; the white garment of a man standing outside was visible.

"Keep you here," she said. "My plane, which has taken Joe Welch to Little America, will be back soon. Tomorrow night I'm going for their answer. Would you like to go with me?"

"Yes." David's mind was roving upon the possibility of escape; and upon other things also. "Yes," he repeated. He stared at her through a moment of silence, then said earnestly:

"Naina, they won't take your threat very seriously. Don't you know that?"

The red was mounting into her throat. He added hastily, "You plan to fling one of the blue blizzards against Little America. They are used to blizzards. It won't hurt them."

"We shall see."

"Yes, but Naina—" He found himself talking to her as though she were a headstrong child. "What good can it do you and your people to antagonize America? You're holding Johnson here. He's an American citizen; now that they know you've got him, they won't tolerate it. And Helga is an American."

"I won't hurt you." She smiled scornfully. "Don't be afraid of me."

He went on more vehemently, "Naina, if you'd only see it the other way round! Johnson's weather control apparatus could be of immense value to the world. Rightly used, here in Antarctica—"

"What interest have I in your world? I'll use the blue ray, some day, to benefit Antarctica; when your cursed nation is out of here."

"Why do you hate America so? It's your country, isn't it? Wasn't your father an—"

He checked himself abruptly. Her face had gone white; her eyes smoldered.

"My country? You talk like a fool!"

He reached to touch her, but she flung off his hands. "Naina, tell me."

She jumped to her feet, blazing. "You are impertinent. Stay where you are. I will send food to you. But I want no more talk with you."

"Naina—"

"Be quiet!"

He lowered his voice; he did not move from his position on the couch, but with his intense gaze he tried to hold her. "Is that Margones out there?"

"No," she said.

"Sit down again. I want to talk to you about Margones. Perhaps you don't understand—I mean you trust him too much. He—"

"I've had enough of you!"

SHE whirled about, and left the room. The door slammed after her; David heard its bars rasp.

The Antarctic native woman who brought him a meal spoke a little English. She assured him that Helga was safe.

"What is your Naina going to do with her?"

The woman shrugged. "Who say what the Naina do?"

Then Naina came again. She stood in the center of the room, smiling sweetly.

"You are all right now?"

"Yes. Did your plane get back?"

She nodded. "The weather is calm. It made a quick trip. Your friend Welch is in Little America now, giving them my orders."

She calmly regarded him. He had leaped to his feet as she entered.

"I've been waiting for you to come again. Where is Helga?"

"She is quite safe." Her smile was queer. It held irony, a faint contempt for Helga; but something else which David could not quite fathom. She added, "You think you love that Helga Johnson, I suppose. Or is it your friend, that Joe Welch, who loves her? You men must always think you love some woman—that is your weakness."

David said, again lowering his voice, "Margones wanted you to ask a ransom for Helga. You were honorable enough to spurn that. I want to talk to you about Margones. I don't trust him; I'm afraid he—close that door, Naina."

She leaped between him and the door as he moved toward it. There was a guard in the corridor. She slammed the door. She turned back to David.

"What did you ask me?"

"Nothing. I was going to say, about Margones—"

"You talk as though I were an imbecile. Margones and his Chileans are useful to me. Men are needed here; our life is hard, there is always much work."

"But you trust him."

"I trust no one. Margones never had my plane unless my most loyal

men, armed, were with him." She waved it away. "You are a fool." Her mood abruptly changed. She smiled again. "But you interest me; I've never seen a man like you before."

Her words brought a new realization to David. This girl was by heritage intelligent and civilized; educated by her father, with a warped knowledge of civilization, but there were finer instincts within her.

She had lived always in this frozen polar desolation. Antarctic half savages, a few captive explorers, and Chilean bandits—it was all the knowledge she had of men. She had never seen a man like David before.

He stood staring at her.

She added: "I'll take you with me on the trip to-night. We start in a few hours."

"Yes," he agreed. "And Johnson and Helga?"

She frowned. "You are much concerned over that Helga."

David saw the flush on her throat. It set a thrill of fear through him; she might so easily be stirred to harm Helga. He said hastily: "You're wrong. I have no love for her."

"No?"

"No. I'm sure my friend, young Welch, loves her. He has for years."

"But not you?"

"No, of course not."

AS David reiterated it, a surge of emotion swept him. He laid a hand on the white flesh of Naina's arm. It was warm.

He said unsteadily: "I think it is you I love."

She allowed his hand to stay there. She turned, and her calm gaze searched him.

"So? You think that already?"

"Yes."

"All men think that." A glint of amusement came to the depths of her eyes; and her soft red lips curled with irony. But her breast stirred with her quickened breath. It seemed that perhaps she was experimenting with this emotion. Suddenly David was wildly stirred. He said: "All men can see your beauty as I see it." He dropped his hand, for the amusement on her face had turned to open contempt.

"Hate and love are very close, Naina. Perhaps it is not love I feel, but hate."

"So?"

He stood gazing down at her. His arms were dangling at his sides; he restrained a wild impulse to fling them around her. He said: "You don't want to make me hate you?"

Her breath came fast between parted lips. "I don't care what you feel for me. Why should I?"

"Because—" he began.

"Because it's fear you feel, not hate," she interrupted. "Every one fears me, and that is right; just as they feared my father." She laughed unsteadily. "I shall keep you with me and make you feel it always."

She went hastily to the door. He stood motionless as she opened it.

"Naina—"

She went out and flung the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

"WE COULD BE FRIENDS."

HELGA, during those hours, had been taken from her father and confined alone in a similar room to David's, with a woman waiting upon her. And just once, Naina came. She sat beside Helga, as she had sat beside David. Helga feared and loathed her.

"What do you want?" Helga demanded.

"So you do not like me to touch you?" Naina said quickly. Helga had drawn back.

"No."

"Well, then, I will not. You're going to ask me if David is safe. He is."

"What do you want with me?" She asked it as David had asked a similar question.

Naina smiled sweetly. "I have promised David a trip. I am waiting for the time to arrive."

"I asked what you wanted of me. You and your father generally killed people unless they could be of use, didn't you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

She asked it with a placid candor incredible, but Helga saw that it was real.

"Why not, indeed?" Helga retorted bitterly. "But you haven't yet killed my father. I can understand that—he's taught you everything you know."

"I think you exaggerate."

"Perhaps. Well, now you have David Dragon and me. You must think I can be of use to you. How?"

"You are a scientist," said Naina. "Is that true?"

"Yes."

"I understood so. I will tell you frankly; I want your loyalty. When I have driven your United States out of Antarctica, your knowledge will be of use to me. I want to rule my country intelligently. This weather control can be put to good use; I can improve the weather as well as make it bad." She smiled whimsically. "Besides, I have eavesdropped on many radio-phone messages in the past year or two. Your activity in Washington was not to my liking. I'd far rather have you here, safe with me."

Helga ignored that. "Have you heard from Joe Welch?"

"He is in Little America. I heard them sending out a call for me a while ago. They would like to talk it over. Hah! They do not know Naina, daughter of the White Bandit. I act, I do not talk."

"You didn't answer them?"

"No. I could not, anyway; I have no sending radiophone."

"You might go to the nearest cache. Is there one near here?"

Naina said: "You seem to think it is your part to ask me questions. I don't want to argue with the United States. I have nothing to say to them beyond my message Joe Welch gave. I will drive them out, or kill them if need be. Why do you stare at me?"

"You seem," said Helga slowly, "perfectly intelligent. But you are not human."

"No?" There was no flush of anger. "Why do you say that?"

"Because you have no regard for human life. You are uncivilized."

It interested Naina. "What do you mean?"

"I mean—" For an instant it struck Helga that she might make this girl understand. But words failed her. She said: "Nothing. You are inhuman, that's all."

"Because I kill?"

"Yes. Your whole conception of humanity."

NAINA was openly amused. "Have your nations ever killed one another?"

"Yes."

"And you called it war. Well, this is war. You who are civilized add many fine words to your killing. I do not bother with that. What is necessary, I do."

Helga stammered. "You are a woman, a beautiful girl—such things seem so incongruous, cruel!"

"And you think cruelty, as you call it, should be kept for man? Woman may be very cruel, Helga." Naina stood up. "I rather like you. We will talk again. You have quaint ideas."

Helga was silent. At the door Naina turned. "I would like to have your loyalty. Your help, because you are intelligent." Her smile turned ironical. "If you would let me, I could be your friend."

Helga stared at her. "When are you coming back?"

"I'm going to take David on the flight over Little America. The weather is fortunately very good."

"Will you take me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

It angered Naina. "That is not your affair."

Helga suddenly thought she knew why Naina would not take her on the flight. She said, as though irrelevantly: "You think I'm in love with David Dragon. That's foolish."

Naina's eyes were flashing. "It does not concern me what your emotions are."

"How long will you be gone on this trip?" Helga asked.

"Not long; twelve or fifteen hours."

"Are you going to take Margones, or leave him here?" Like David, Helga most feared Margones.

Naina stood with her hand on the door. "What difference? But I shall leave him here."

"May I stay with my father, then? I have not seen him in eight years. Will you let me stay with him?"

Helga had risen to follow Naina to the door; and she saw, with a leap of her heart, that Margones and two of

his men were guarding the passage outside. But they seemed too far away to have overheard her.

She touched Naina. "Will you put me with my father, please?"

"I thought you did not want to touch me?" said Naina scornfully.

"But I do. I—I like you. You said you could be my friend—we could be friends."

They gazed at each other. In most ways they were as far apart as the poles, yet it seemed to Helga, as she gazed at this strange, beautiful girl, that all in a moment the barrier between them might be bridged.

"Before we leave I will put you with your father," said Naina.

As she left, Helga stared silently after her.

A few hours later, with David standing at a distance in the passage, Helga was taken from this cell and led to her father's room. She had no opportunity to speak to David.

At Johnson's door Margones was standing. Naina approached. "I told her she could stay with her father. Johnson, here is your daughter. Guard them well, Margones."

"*Sí, señorita,*" Margones responded. Naina did not see his face, nor did Johnson. But Helga saw it; a grinning leer which struck her cold.

"*Señorita,* you can trust me always."

He shoved Helga into Johnson's room and closed the door upon them.

CHAPTER X.

THE BLUE BLIZZARD.

"YOU see the lights, David?"

"Yes."

A spot of yellow glow came up over the distant frozen horizon; the

lights of Little America. The uplands here at this twelve thousand foot altitude lay purple and black and white, a congealed desolation in the starlight. The overland trail wound back into the mountains, headed for the pole; it showed as a silver ribbon with occasional spots of yellow beacons. The night was cold and still, and the stars blazed in a sky empty of clouds.

David and Naina sat in the cabin adjoining the control room of the plane. It had been a swift trip, a few hours from Naina's isolated camp, down here to the inland edge of the Ice Barrier on the Frozen Plateau.

Naina had been unusually silent. She had paid little attention to the navigation of the plane. There were four navigating Antarcticans in the control room, but David had had no opportunity to observe them closely.

Another native, a squat fellow in white garments, sat hunched in the doorway with an automatic on his knees. Naina had spoken to him in the native language, and then said to David:

"He has my orders to shoot if you make a move to annoy me. You understand, David?"

"I will not annoy you," David said quietly.

The lights of Little America widened and spread at the horizon. Within David was a tumult of emotion.

He said, "You know they won't dim the lights for your threat."

"We shall see."

"Don't do anything foolish, Naina."

It was 8.45 P. M., Greenwich time. The plane was mounting. The thrum of its muffled motors hummed and vibrated in the silent cabin. Naina sat tense.

David moved to touch her. He

had tried it several times, but always she had cast him off.

"Let me alone." She flung the guard a warning glance. She added, "David, he might kill you. He has my orders—I would not want him to misunderstand, and shoot you before I could stop him."

David moved away. "They may attack us. They know you're coming—suppose they send up a plane to meet us."

"I'm going high. They won't come up through the black cloud."

They climbed steadily. David could see no other plane. The lights of the little city were closer, and far beneath them now. The checkered outlines of the snow-packed streets were visible; and the great gray-black gash, which was the near-by glacier with a ramp of snow field beside it.

Naina moved to a signal switch. In the adjoining room, David saw a sudden activity. And mingled with the thrum of the motors now came other sounds. The hissing of the weather control mechanism.

David had not been allowed in the plane's control room. But from where he sat now, he could glimpse Johnson's apparatus. An Antarctic was bending over it, operating the mechanism; fluorescent tubes glowing with intensified electronic streams; mirrors with beams of tiny blue light upon them, whirling now; moisture sprayed downward into the atmosphere; vibrations of unknown character darting out. And through the cabin windows, David saw a cold, blue lightning flashing with its tiny stabs.

A cloud of liquid air rolled out and downward from the vessel. The vibrations fed it. The moisture clustered down there into a gathering, falling

fog. The altered air pressure brought the wind. The plane swayed and bucked. Then it mounted higher. It steadied.

AFTER a moment, the mechanism was shut off. Silence came again; the blue lightning ceased. The plane was slowly circling close above a gray-black cloud which wholly obscured the landscape beneath. But overhead, the stars were shining clear.

"Almost nine o'clock," Naina murmured. A familiar type of television mirror was on the wall near her and David. It was empty of image. In the control room, David saw two Antarcticans with a reel of thin-drawn wire.

They cast out an image-finder—a lens mounted with its Forsythe mechanism in a small metal cylinder. The wire lowered it a few hundred feet down through the cloud, where it hung like a camera gazing down at the city.

"Nine o'clock," murmured Naina. She snapped on the television connections. The mirror brightened. David saw the image of Little America as seen by the dangling lens. The city lights were shining clear. Defiance!

David could not see Naina's face; she was turned away from him. But he heard her voice.

"So they defy me." She stood up suddenly and raised her white arms to the men in the control room. And then David saw her face, grim and white, beautiful, but set with the stamp of her strange, irrational hatred.

"Defy me!"

"Naina—"

She did not heed him. She stood like a barbaric Eastern princess imperiously commanding death to her enemies.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



*Under them the ice creaked and groaned
and snapped in warning.*

The Peace Offering

Coast Guardsman Pete Borglund, in charge of Gull Island station on Lake Michigan, was a life saver first, last and all the time—nor did his skill grow rusty in the ice-bound days

By KINGSBURY SCOTT

PIERRE NICOLET, of Little Traverse, carried the mail by dog team from the Michigan mainland over the ice to Gull Island. It was thirty miles from the Gull Island Coast Guard station across to Pine River, the nearest mainland post office, and the windrowed ice which blocked the narrows in Lake Michigan at this point did not make easy going, even for a sturdy French-Indian and his husky dog team.

Pierre—the islanders called him Perry—was under contract with the government to make trips twice a week from December until May, but he could

not always keep this schedule. He missed many trips because the blizzards, which sweep through from the Straits of Mackinac, make it hard for men or dogs to live out there on the ice.

At the tail-end of a tough blizzard early in April, which is not a very spring-like month in the north, Pierre came toiling over the ice to Gull Island. His low sled was piled with mail sacks, which had been accumulating in the Pine River post office. Pete Borglund, officer-in-charge of the Gull Island Coast Guard station, watched him until he drew up in front of the building.

Pierre's white teeth flashed when the stocky keeper of the station hailed him.

"Here I am again, Capum," Pierre laughed. "I ain' seen you two-three-four days, eh? Storm she's to blame for tha'. Bad business, comin' on the ice now. Every time I start, Capum Billings at Pine River station says: 'Don' you try get 'cross there to-day, Pierre. Firs' t'ing you know, you get los' in big snow. Then we get bad job lookin' all over th' lake for you.' I tell him: 'Mebbe, but I got thees job with Uncle Sam an' I got to take thees mail to Gull Island. Piles gettin' bigger every day an' thees Irish people gettin' madder an' madder because their letters don' come.' So here I am again, but she's no fun out there to-day, Capum."

Pete Borglund studied the big half-breed, whose dark eyes were shining good-naturedly from beneath the heavy fur cap. The mail carrier presented a picturesque figure in his gaudy red and white and green mackinaw jacket. He needed only a gay sash to create a perfect picture of the ancient *voyageur* from whom he was descended.

"It's been a bad blow, Perry," Pete Borglund agreed. "You were wise not to try it before. It's no fit place out there for any man. A fellow has to do his job though, I suppose, however, little thanks he gets from them he tries to help. At that you're in better on Gull Island than I am."

"Not so good here for you, eh, Capum?" Pierre remarked quizzically. "These people got funny notions, tha's right. An' Ol' Matt, too, he's dam' mad at you, eh?"

"That's about it, Perry," Borglund said. "I'm in bad, all right. Matt Clancy's got hold enough on these people to turn every man, woman and child on the island against me. They

think I'm some kind of a curse. Even the poor Indians take me to be bad medicine. They all fight shy o' me. Every once in a while I hear that some o' these wild young devils are framing something to get me. Lord knows I won't bother 'em. They can make and drink all the booze they want to here on the island. But when they start putting it in their boats and running it across to the mainland, I'm under orders to stop 'em, and I'm going to carry out orders, Pierre. At that, I've been letting 'em off easy. I've always given 'em plenty o' chance to heave their cargoes overboard before I come up 'longside. Father Malone's about the only one on the island, outside o' my crew and Mike Burke over in the lighthouse, that don't treat me as if I was some sort o' disease," Borglund added.

"**A**H yes, the good father," Pierre agreed. "He's good man. He's got hard job here like the rest of us—he's got more than prayin' to do here, Capum, but he's strong man, an' tha's good t'ing. Now I got to go 'long. These people wait for me now at post office for their letter an' paper, an' they're mad I don' come quicker."

Pierre Nicolet was right about Father Malone. Gull Island people needed a strong hand. The islanders were descendants of the mainland fishermen, who had taken possession of the island in an earlier day and settled there. The old-timers had made money with their fishing; fair fortunes had come to them from the lake in the hauls of whitefish and trout. But the younger generation had grown wild and reckless, with little respect for the law. Their isolation served to make them still rasher.

The islanders had their own church,

a modest little Roman Catholic chapel, set down in the midst of a parish which extended over all of the islands in the Gull Island group. Five hundred people, not including the Indians, pathetic survivors of the early lake tribes, came within its jurisdiction. It was not an easy place for a parish priest.

Old Matt Clancy was the island's leader. Grown old now and a bit crushed by his son's wild escapades, Clancy still held the leadership through his inherent will to rule. His towering figure, crowned by its thatch of snow-white hair, commanded the attention and respect of Gull Islanders, who followed him faithfully. One could not see him without getting the suggestion of the patriarch.

The open break between Matt Clancy and Pete Borglund had come when Borglund and his two-man crew risked their lives in a November storm the year before, to bring young Bud Clancy ashore safely in a superb feat of boat-handling. Old Matt, never warm toward Borglund, had softened a bit until he learned that Borglund's orders were to hold Bud and his boat for the Federal officers on a charge of running booze to the mainland. Even Father Malone could not bring about a change of heart in the old man.

"I'm not sayin' it wasn't a brave thing an' as fine a bit of seamanship as a man could ask for," persisted Old Matt Clancy, when Father Malone remonstrated with him. "None the less, 'twas Borglund that sent me poor lad to prison, wit' all his talk about obeyin' orders and doin' his duty. As long as I live I'll be agin him, father."

"It wasn't for him to say, Matt," Father Malone argued. "He had his orders to arrest Bud for running liquor to the mainland and there was

nothing for him to do but obey. It wasn't as if he hadn't warned the boy often enough. Bud chose to take the chance and now he's paying his penalty. Besides, if it hadn't been for Borglund last November, Bud wouldn't have been alive to-day."

"Maybe that's true enough," Matt agreed. "But there's small comfort in havin' a son o' mine snatched from an honorable death in the lake to be immedjutly dishonored by the man that saved him. Beggin' your pardon, father, I'll not change me opinion o' Pete Borglund, an' the rest of us here won't either. We'll not be happy till he's chased from the island."

CLANCY was as good as his word. Pete Borglund had few friends, indeed, on Gull Island. The fishing village, with its wharves along the bayshore and its one main street curving along behind them, lay two miles inland from the Coast Guard station. Pete Borglund seldom went to town.

A veteran of the old Life Saving Service with an official record as an "excellent man in a boat," he had not transplanted easily to the Coast Guard when it was organized. He was considered out of step, and out of sympathy with the new service. Inspectors complained of laxness in discipline at his station. But he was nearing the age for retirement and Coast Guard officers are human. The assignment as officer-in-charge of the "Inactive station" on Gull Island offered him better pay than he could have drawn with his rating in a mainland station. Besides, it quite effectively disposed of him.

He lived at the station and his only associates were the two young surfmen who composed his crew. It was lonely for Pete Borglund and he was

always glad to see Pierre Nicolet, the friendly half-breed. When the mail carrier failed to make his trips Pete Borglund sorely missed his little chats. And so on this afternoon in early April, when Pierre came with the delayed mail, Pete greeted him eagerly. The following morning he was up early to see the mail carrier and his dogs off for the mainland.

"He's not likely to get back here soon," he said to himself.

His guess was correct. Pierre and his dogs did not come back on the scheduled mail day. Gull Islanders had heard the ice singing and booming for days.

Except for the telephone cable which stretched across the bottom of Lake Michigan to the mainland at Pine River, Gull Island was in complete isolation. The islanders and the straits people knew the signs, but they were glad.

It had been a hard winter on Gull Island, with many blizzards raging. There had been little chance for any of the islanders to get out of doors for any real work. Mail had been irregular and it had been necessary for many families to live largely from their stores of smoked and salted fish.

Now the ice in the lake was showing signs of letting go, in spite of the cold freezing rains, which turned into howling blizzards overnight.

With the break-up at hand, stark tragedy swooped down without warning upon the island. One of the Indian children fell ill. The next day he was dead and Father Malone had prayers in the chapel for the repose of his soul. The island men blasted a hole in the frozen, rocky soil of the Indian burying-ground for his little body.

A few hours later an Indian woman came weeping to Father Malone to tell him that her little girl was dying. From then on, there was little rest for the priest.

Within a few days there were five new little Indian graves blasted in the icy ground. Father Malone closed the school, which housed both white children and Indians, and sent the sisters out to nurse the sick. When the first white child died, panic seized the emotional islanders.

Peter Borglund was sitting up late in his little office at the station, when Father Malone came slipping up the sleety path, struggling against the gale, which was driving the rain into his face.

As he came into the office the priest was pale and worn, and his big form was bent by fatigue. The ice fell in little jagged pieces from his oilskins.

"I've come to talk to you about the situation here, Mr. Borglund," he said, sinking into a chair. "The children are dying, with no doctor and no medicine to save them. It is serious, sir—a tragedy."

"I've heard about it, of course, and I'm sorry. I wish I could help," Pete Borglund told him. "These islanders hate me, father, but God knows I've nothing against any o' them. I'd do anything I could to help them save the kids. Anything we have here at the station, that you can use, you're welcome to, father."

"If I could get in touch with the mainland and talk to a doctor over the telephone," Father Malone said. "He might be able to give me a diagnosis. I'm working in the dark, Mr. Borglund, and these poor people are putting their faith in me. I've a grave suspicion as to what this scourge is, but

I'm not sure, and I don't want to raise an alarm."

WITHIN half an hour, Father Malone was talking over the telephone to Dr. Johnstone in Pine River. When he turned back from the telephone, the priest's face was grave.

"It's as I feared, Mr. Borglund," he said. "We'll need God's help, sir. It's diphtheria."

"No!" Pete Borglund cried. "They'll all die before any help can get to us. Oh, it's a damned crime to let this island go all winter without a doctor! The state should keep a doctor here."

"Dr. Johnstone asked me to keep in touch with him. He may be able to give me some directions from time to time, which will help," the priest observed. "If we had antitoxin there might be some chance of checking the disease. But that is out of the question, of course; and it would be necessary to have a physician anyway. There are three new cases to-night," Father Malone went on. "Bud Clancy's little girl came down with it this afternoon. It breaks my heart to see poor old Matt. He's a hard man, true enough, and unreasonable and stubborn, but he worships that little granddaughter. I fear for his reason if she is taken. And the pity of it—her father away, serving sentence for his sins against the law."

"Poor little thing," Borglund mused. "There's not much chance for her, I suppose, or for any o' them, with no doctor to take care o' them."

"I'm afraid death will reap a harvest," Father Malone answered. "Some of the stronger ones will pull through, of course, but the odds are against them. I have prayed to God

to grant me strength and skill to help these poor people in their trouble. But I well realize that more than prayers are needed here."

As he spoke the telephone bell rang. Borglund answered the call. "Yes, this is Borglund speaking," he said. "It's Billings calling from Pine River," he informed Father Malone. For a few minutes he listened intently. Then he shouted into the mouthpiece.

"My God, man! You're not letting him go? He can't make it! The ice is breaking up out there. It'll start moving any minute. I saw open water out there to-day, just before sundown. It's blowing a living gale over here now and sleeting hard. The ice'll grind itself to pieces in no time, if it ever starts going."

Borglund's face was white as he turned to Father Malone.

"You may pray now, father," he said. "Perry Nicolet's started from Pine River. He's bringing young Doc Mulligan with him, and they've antitoxin. Billings said Dr. Johnstone had a supply on hand at the hospital, and Mulligan insisted on trying to get over here with it. Said it would be useless to try to use it without a doctor here."

"Dr. Mulligan is a Gull Island boy," Father Malone whispered. "He'd try to help his own people. God give him strength! They are brave, these Gull Island people, Mr. Borglund."

"Too much so sometimes," Borglund observed. "Good old Perry 'd tackle it, of course, if somebody urged him on. They haven't got a chance, though!"

Father Malone's lips were moving though he uttered no sound. Pete Borglund eyed him silently, his big red hands gripping the arms of his chair.

"We'll have to stand by, the boys and me," Borglund broke the silence at

last. "I'm afraid it's little we can do for the poor devils."

His two young surfmen, hardly more than boys, came into the office in response to Borglund's call. In a word or two he explained the situation.

"Perry and young Doc Mulligan are on their way over the ice with a dog team," he said. "If they've got nerve enough to try it, I'd like to give 'em a hand, if I can. I'm not ordering you fellows out, understand. We may all go under, but it's a case o' life or death—here on the island for a lot o' kids or out there on the ice for us. The chances are all against winning, either way."

His two young surfmen showed no hesitancy. "We're ready to try anything you say, sir," Paul Bradley said. "All right, then, we'll head out to meet 'em," Borglund replied in a low voice. "We'll take your dogs, Malcolm. They're good, willing brutes, used to bad weather and with little fear o' the ice and water in 'em. We'll have to load the light dory on the sled. It's a bit light for this work, but it'll carry all of us, if we have to use it."

WITH warm clothing under their oilskins and their knit service caps pulled down over their heads, Pete Borglund and his little crew were soon ready for their battle. The four big black dogs were barking and straining at their harness in their eagerness. They were not huskies of the wolf breed, these great Michigan sled dogs, which Malcolm had trained to harness, but cross-breeds with black shaggy coats, not unlike Newfoundlanders. They had courageous hearts, and they could pull heavy loads.

Guided only by a pocket compass, Pete Borglund and his strange outfit pushed on past the entrance to Gull

Island Bay, the sled skidding perilously on the sleet-crusted ice. The black night completely enveloped them. In front, their flash lights played grotesquely on the glistening ice windrows. At their backs the only evidence of the shore they were leaving was the dull and bright gleam of the revolving beach at the Gull Island lighthouse. Under them the ice groaned and snapped as if trying to warn them back from their peril.

The four big dogs settled down willingly to their long, heart-breaking pull. At each halt the courageous brutes dropped down in their harness to lick paws lacerated by jagged edges of the ice, which had not been glazed smooth by the sleet.

Far out from the island the three came to open water, splashing freezing spray over the edge of the ice field. Paul and Malcolm began unlash the dory from the sled. The dogs, eying the black menacing water, whined as Malcolm urged them into the bobbing boat. Crowded together in the bow of the sturdy dory, the brutes pressed tightly against one another. The sled lay athwart the stern, and with Paul and Malcolm at the oars and Pete Borglund at the helm, the loaded craft pushed out on a perilous voyage across the open water.

"There must be a big stretch o' this," Pete Borglund observed, "from the way the sea's making in here." The cold spray striking the craft's sides was beating into the faces of the men and forming more ice on the dogs' coats.

It was a hard, cruel pull over the rough water, but the three Coast Guardsmen in their stout dory had been merely testing their nerves for the struggle which was to come. Once across the open water the dory was caught in a field of broken, grinding

ice. Huge cakes, rising and falling with the sea, ground against the boat's sides in a constant threat to crush the craft.

Malcolm and Paul stowed their oars and unlimbered the stout boat hooks. With Borglund playing his flash light on the moving ice, the two surfmen pushed away the solid chunks as they rolled sullenly toward the boat. Bit by bit, back-breaking toil sent the dory forward deeper and deeper into the ice field. At last the bow of the craft struck solid ice which would not give way under the pressure of the boat-hooks.

"Here we are again, boys," Borglund commented. "We're this far anyway. God knows if we'll ever get back."

"We get nicely warmed up at this job, sir," Malcolm said grimly. "That's something. If we go under we'll go sweating."

"I wish to hell some o' the brass button boys could see a real crew work," Borglund grumbled. "And we ain't chasing rum boats either."

"Here's where we pack up for the rest o' this nice little trip," he directed. "Get the animals out for the parade."

As the black night began to melt into a cold, grayish morning the little caravan struggled on over a heart-breaking trail. The men were too chilled, too fatigued, too low in spirits to talk, with weary muscles aching, they plodded onward with heads down. The big dogs, tails drooped and tongues hanging, lumbered along, leaving a trail of blood on the ice from their slashed paws.

With the approach of dawn a cold fog began settling over the ice-bound lake. The hope-killing mist shut them in more than the darkness had done. Suddenly Pete Borglund stopped in his tracks and called out:

"Hold up! Stop your dogs a minute, Malcolm! I thought I heard something."

THE three listened intently. From out of the fog a faint cry came to them. They stood scarcely breathing, straining their ears, and the dogs raised their noses and sniffed. Again the cry came muffled by the fog. It was a human voice out of the wilderness ahead somewhere, and the Coast Guards started forward.

"Dead ahead," Pete Borglund said. "Keep on dead ahead and listen."

As they moved on again, slipping and sliding painfully, clambering wearily over the hummocks of ice, the cry seemed nearer. They were hearing it more distinctly now and they caught the note of terror in it. Calling forward all of their strength, they spurred their worn bodies at faster pace.

So dense was the fog that Pete Borglund and his crew would have passed by had not the dogs raised their heads and whined. Not ten feet away Borglund caught the outline of two figures huddled together on the ice. Pierre Nicolet was sitting with his head in his hands. Young Dr. Mulligan lay on his side, his head pillowed on his arm. Their clothing was frozen stiff.

Pierre looked up at Pete Borglund with a wild look in his eyes.

"Mother of God!" he breathed. "Tell me I don't dream thees. Is it I am dead? Capum, is it you? Tell me!"

"I'm here all right, Perry," Borglund answered. "What's left o' me. Is the doc gone?"

"Not—quite," came from the prostrate man. "Close to it, I guess. I can't go on. Fell on the ice—leg's gone, I believe. Pierre dragged me. Should have gone on without me as I told him. He might have got through."

"Where's your dogs, Perry?" Borglund asked.

"Gone! Gone!" Pierre sobbed. "We struck soft slush ice in the dark. All went through—dogs, sled, food, compass, everythin'. We pull each other out, thees doctor an' me, but we couldn't get my good dogs tha' sleep with me, eat with me, live with me, like little brothers so lon'."

"We've come miles over this damned ice," the doctor groaned. "We should have died like gentlemen back there with the dogs. All this damned fighting for nothing, after all?"

"The medicine—that's all gone, too?" Borglund asked anxiously.

"The serum?" the doctor cried out, half deliriously. "No—I carry that on me!" He tapped his breast eagerly. "I've got it here in my pocket. That's what kept us coming on. If we'd lost that we'd have quit and died with the dogs."

"Then we'll get started back," Pete Borglund commanded. "We'll ride the doc in the sled. The rest of us'll have to mush it along lively, because this ice is going to pieces damned fast. There's lots o' open water between here and Gull Island."

The start back toward the island was made by daylight, but light only showed how desperate was their fight to survive. There were times when the black fog enwrapped and bewildered them, and only the intelligence of the dogs saved them all from plunging into open water. Mile after mile they crawled as rapidly as their weary, stiffened bodies could move over ice that trembled beneath them. The cracking and booming filled their ears with terrifying din.

They were confronted often by menacing open water. Four times they were compelled to unlash their boat

from the sled and launch it in the rolling water. With two extra men to carry, the dory shipped water dangerously each time it made its voyage. Doc Mulligan lay helpless, bundled in the wet blankets with which the sled had been padded. Pierre Nicolet, stimulated by faint hope, joined forces with Borglund and his crew in their grueling task.

IT was near mid afternoon when Pete Borglund looked at his watch.

"I figure we must be getting close in," he said, to cheer the lagging figures beside him. "As near's I can figure we ought to fetch up ashore in something like two hours more. There ain't any of us got much more fight left in us, and the dogs are about bushed too. We ain't got far off the course, according to my compass reading, but I wish the fog'd lift a bit. We could get our bearings then."

"We may be gettin' closer in, but—look ahead!" cried Malcolm, who was just ahead with the dogs. The little caravan stopped short and the travelers groaned. Directly in front of them lay a wide stretch of open water, in which broken ice was being churned and ground by huge swells.

"I thought we were through with that stuff," Pete Borglund growled bitterly.

"We better stay here an' die, capum," Pierre Nicolet groaned. "We're gon' die if we go out there anyway."

"No! We'll tackle it!" Borglund snapped. "We've come this far. Now we'll fight this damned ice to a finish."

Painfully and carefully the dory was launched again, sinking to its gunwales in the slush ice which surged dangerously against the boat's sides. The dogs were frightened at the jolt-

ing of the ice against the boat, and it was with utmost difficulty that Malcolm prevented them from upsetting the dory and sending all to a quick death.

Paul and Pierre, armed with boat hooks, were clawing a way through the surging ice when Borglund cried out in alarm:

"Shake her up, boys! This ice is going to close in damned sudden."

The dogs, sensing the danger, bolted out of the dory as soon as its bow struck solid ice again, and crouched whining and shivering as Malcolm cursed them. Pete Borglund and Paul seized the sled with Dr. Mulligan and yanked it to safety on the ice without ceremony. The injured man, biting his teeth into his lips, suppressed his cry of pain at the hurried handling. Pierre, with all of his great muscles tense, held the dory fast to the ice until all were out of her. Then he leaped for safety.

He was not an instant too soon. A deafening roar struck the little party dumb with horror. The two great ice floes came together with a grinding crash which jarred every man in the party from his feet. In the midst of the solid mass was the wreckage of the dory, crushed to splinters.

"There goes another chance o' getting home alive," growled Borglund, struggling to his feet. "What a close one! More o' the hellish luck that's been chasing us. Now we'll have to go ahead with the dogs and trust to luck there ain't no more open water between here and the island."

They were nearer Gull Island than they knew. Almost without warning the ice cliffs which marked the shore line rose up out of the fog to greet them. They tried to cheer, but their effort was feeble. With heads bent forward and jaws set the four men, who

were on their feet, plunged forward in silence.

Mike Burke, the light-keeper, was the first to see them come crawling in over the ice, out of the thinning fog. With a shout to his wife to telephone the news to the store in the village, he went running out to help the faltering men and their exhausted dogs to make the last lap of their journey.

Within a few minutes all the available motor cars on the island, most of them antiquated Fords, were slipping and bumping over the bayshore road to the station at a perilous rate of speed. Father Malone was in one of them. Old Matt Clancy, muffled in his reefer, his face drawn and his big body shrunken, was with the priest.

TENDER hands lifted young Dr. Mulligan from the sled and carried him into the station office. Some one produced a bottle and poured a generous dose of fiery liquor down the doctor's throat. Dr. Mulligan coughed and gasped.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed as soon as he had recovered his breath. "Do you want to kill me? Keep that stuff for yourselves!"

"The Lord be praised, he's alive!" cried an old man, the tears running down his wind-whipped face. "He's alive an' safe at home wid us to save the children this day. He's a Mulligan, true enough—and the blessed courage of him to come back to his own like this!"

"It's a fine thing you've done this day, Tommy Mulligan," Father Malone said gently.

"Any more dead, father?" the doctor asked.

"Two in the night, Tommy, and many more very near it, I fear," the priest answered sadly.

"Bud Clancy's?" the doctor whispered. "Borglund was telling me she's among the sick. I went to school with Bud and played with him as a boy. I always had a liking for him. I wish I could do something for his little one, father."

"She's still alive, but very bad, Tommy," the priest told him.

"Then we'll save her, father. We'll save them all now," Dr. Mulligan declared. "I can't walk, but the boys'll carry me around to the sick little ones and we'll fight to the end for them."

Old Matt Clancy, shaking violently with emotion, knelt down and clasped his arms about the doctor's shoulders. His voice broke and the tears came unchecked.

"I'm beholden to you for the rest o' me life for what you've done for us this day. It's proud we all are that you're a Gull Islander, me lad. You're a credit to the Mulligans from the beginnin' o' time."

"Never mind me, Uncle Matt," soothed the doctor. "I deserve nothing. I came because I wanted to. Pierre felt as I did. The man to thank for our being here is Pete Borglund. If it wasn't for him and his two boys we'd been dead hours ago. There's a man that is a man, Uncle Matt, that same Pete Borglund."

Old Matt Clancy nodded his head in agreement.

While he waited for Father Malone to have a car prepared to take him on his first rounds of the sick, Dr. Mulligan briefly recited the story of the struggle for life out on the ice. The increasing crowd in the station office pressed closer for every word, breathing little cries of amazement.

"He didn't have to go out there to

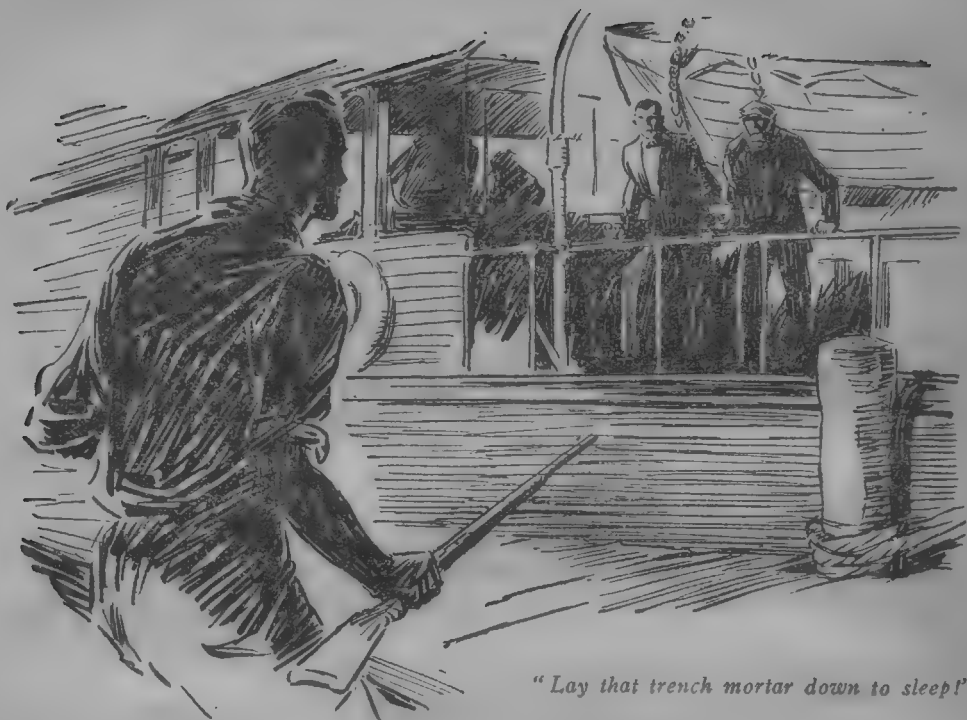
meet us," the doctor declared. "His service regulations don't require any such risk as that was. He went because he wanted to help you island people—because he knew Pierre and I could never get through without his help. And we couldn't have made it, either. If we're in time to save the lives of these children, the credit'll be his more than mine. He's a man, I'm telling you."

Old Matt Clancy struggled to stand erect. He squared his shoulders and shook his white mane. His eyes gleamed.

"I'll say this to you, Tommy Mulligan, an' all the rest o' you," he declared. "I've never said Pete Borglund wasn't a brave man, an' I never will say it. 'Twould be a lie if I did. He has the courage of a lion, an' he'll do more'n his duty if it costs him his life. I'll not say I like him, because I don't. I hate him for what he did to my boy. But I've the respect for him that any brave man deserves. I'll say a prayer o' gratitude wit' the next one an' I'm beholden to him for what he's done this day.

"None of you islanders can say a Clancy's not grateful. What trouble there's been in the past's between him and me, I want none o' you islanders mixin' in or quarrelin' wid a brave man like him. He's man enough to handle his end o' the difficulty, an' I can take care o' meself. If he and I have any scores to pay each other, we'll pay 'em wit'out the help o' anybody else."

The little group pressed forward eagerly to observe the effect of what seemed like an unbelievable peace offering. But there was no response. Pete Borglund was dead asleep in his armchair near the stove, his chin on his big chest.



"Lay that trench mortar down to sleep!"

The Treasure on Skeleton Key

Menaced by a murderous old man and his ally, the king of the Gulf rum-runners, Tommy Varden fights for his buried treasure and a mysterious girl

By **LORING BRENT**

Author of "Bringing the Boom to Vingo," "Vingo's Benevolent Bloodhounds," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TOMMY VARDEN, convalescing from illness, loss of his fortune, and disappointment in love, comes to the Ten Thousand Islands off the Gulf coast of Florida, and buys Friendship Key, in spite of the popular belief that it and its northern neighbor, Skeleton Key, are haunted. Mysterious old Ezra Cable, who lives with his daughter Joan on Skeleton, tries to buy

or scare Tommy off, but he refuses to leave.

The first night he leaves his frightened negro, Blue, in the hastily erected house, and proceeds to hunt for the treasure presumably buried on this key by his pirate ancestor, John Varden. But, according to his reckoning, the spot indicated in the pirate's letter is across Dead Man's Pass, the swift and

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 26.

treacherous channel between the two keys, and twenty-five feet in a thicket on Cable's Skeleton Key.

Cable, seeing him, warns him off with a shotgun, and advises him to leave Friendship or be killed.

Aunt Chloe, Joan's old colored servant, secretly begs Tommy to take Joan away from there before Dirk Jellico, Gulf rum-runner and a crony of Ezra Cable's, carries her off. Tommy says he has no intention of doing so. But when, one night, Joan rows across and tells him Jellico is drinking with her father and threatens to take her away in the morning, Tommy realizes that he isn't so disillusioned with women as he thought he was. He offers to take her to his sister, and Joan rows back to get her things.

Suddenly a speedboat roars up to the wharf, outlining the dumfounded Tommy Varden in the glare of search-lights.

CHAPTER IX.

TIGER OF THE GULF.

THE ebony-black power cruiser, with throttled, softly-blubbing engines, was laid with marvelous seamanship alongside the pier. In the play of deck lights, Tommy swiftly inspected her. He knew this make of pleasure yacht—an express cruiser, a commuter, especially designed for millionaires who wished to reach their offices from their estates at a speed slightly under a mile a minute.

Three motors drove her like a torpedo through the water. She would weather anything; in the hands of a capable skipper and engineer, she would arrive anywhere on time. Her appointments were luxurious—she was a graceful thing of steel, of teak and

satinwood and glistening brass. A proper floating palace, Tommy reflected, or fortress, for the picturesque king of Gulf rum-runners. There was probably a large-caliber machine gun mounted in her forward deck well. He wondered how much liquor she carried.

Two figures lounged in shadow at the rail near Tommy, facing him. In the right hand of each he detected the significant glint of metal. He was covered.

A soft, cold voice from the darkness above said: "Lay that trench mortar down to sleep, big boy."

Tommy deposited his Winchester at his feet. He did this with reluctance. He was confused by the rapidity with which things were happening. The black cruiser had shot in from the night like an arrow. He was filled with curiosity, but he wasn't alarmed.

The soft, cold voice went on: "Midge, ooze over there and get that howitzer."

The man addressed as Midge vaulted over the rail to the pier, stooped down and picked up Tommy's rifle. Fingers brushed against Tommy's pockets, and he smiled. He was being "frisked" for concealed weapons. He was glad that his automatic pistol was safe at the cabin with Blue.

For a moment, as Midge stooped down, his face was illuminated by a light from a porthole. It was pock-marked and scarred—a vicious, ugly face.

Midge returned to the cruiser with the rifle and resumed his place at the rail.

A slight figure emerged from the pilot house and started climbing down to the foredeck.

"Stand right where you are, big boy."

--Tommy smiled.

"Keep that baby covered, boys."

The watchdogs at the rail stirred slightly. Another voice, deep and respectful, issued from the pilot house:

"My indicator shows only six inches of water under the keel at the bow, Mr. Jellico. This tide is running out."

The descending figure replied: "We'll be out in ten minutes, skipper. Come over here, big boy, and let me see the color of your eyes."

Tommy walked over. So this was Dirk Jellico—the king of the Gulf rum smugglers!

DIRK JELLICO stepped out into light—and Tommy uttered a little grunt of surprise. The man was not taller than five feet three, and he did not look like a king of the rum smugglers. He wore a black pin-striped suit which was padded at the shoulders and form-fitting at the waist. A cuff of cream silk protruded from each sleeve. A red-and-black batik tie, in which a large diamond sparkled, blossomed above his vest.

His black hair was slicked back so smoothly and with such a generous use of pomade that it resembled a black enamel skullcap. His skin was olive. His eyebrows were slender and femininely arched. And his eyes were as cold and as deadly as a cobra's.

A drifting breath of air informed Tommy that the pomade was scented. The fragrance came to Tommy mingled with that of some heavy, oily perfume. These odors seemed to come from that slender, deadly-eyed figure in a sort of fog. They were offensive to Tommy. He detested men who used any kind of perfume.

Had it not been for the deadliness of those eyes and the cruelty of the thin, dark-red mouth, Tommy would-

have laughed, so strongly was the Dirk Jellico of actuality in contrast with the Dirk Jellico he had imagined.

Tommy summed him up: "Typical big city gunman," and was accordingly mystified.

"Come closer, big boy."

Tommy advanced until he was standing within two feet of Dirk Jellico. The air was dense with perfume. The cold black eyes contemplated him as steadily as if they were painted in his face, and for the first time Tommy was a little concerned. They were killer's eyes, as black, as cold, as inhuman as if they were made of jet.

In a voice that was thin and cold and somehow suggestive of steel, Dirk Jellico asked, "Where is she, Jack?"

"Who?" Tommy returned.

"Don't muss up my temper, big boy. The Cable girl."

The perfume, the eyes and the mouth of Dirk Jellico were working upon Tommy as yeast works upon dough. He was rapidly learning to dislike Dirk Jellico.

He shrugged and said: "As if I knew."

"Or weren't putting up a nifty bluff!" Dirk Jellico withdrew his hands from his pants pockets and placed them upon the rail. They were small; stubby and hairy. A great diamond winked on one finger.

"Buddy," the cold voice drawled, "you are playing with short-fuse dynamite. I have been hearing a lot about you. I don't know what your racket is, but I don't like the looks of things, and I don't think that you and I are going to be friends. What are you doing on this island?"

"Minding my own business," Tommy snapped.

The cobra eyes blinked once.

"Well, that remains to be seen.

Out there in that Gulf, about five miles, there is a reef about four feet under water at high tide. Out around that reef you can't see the water for the sharks' fins. I've been thinking your case over all evening, Jack. If you stick that big nose of yours into my business, I'm going to declare a Roman holiday and take you for a ride out to that reef and leave you standing there. Then I'm going to sit down and turn on my radio and watch those sharks shred you up for supper."

There was no smile at Dirk Jellico's mouth or in his black eyes, and his voice was without humor. Tommy knew that the man was capable of carrying out such a plan. Tommy was suddenly filled with blazing hatred.

THE dapper, cold-voiced man inquired: "Where's that girl?"

"You heard me!" Tommy Varden snapped.

"Well, my hearing gets better when I know a man better. I don't know you so well, but I will before I'm through, buddy! Keep him covered, boys, and let him have it if he moves an inch. Things smell kind of funny to me."

"They mightn't smell so funny," Tommy rapped out, "if there wasn't so much cheap perfume in the air."

He was totally unprepared for the snakelike swiftness of Dirk Jellico's reprisal. The hand on which the diamond twinkled flicked up from the rail. A fist caught Tommy sharply on the side of his jaw.

The blow sent him staggering across the pier. He would have fallen into the water if the Barracuda had not been there. He sprawled against the cabin, pushed himself away and started toward Dirk Jellico. But he did not reach Dirk Jellico. The glint of steel

in the hands of the watchdogs halted him. He stopped six feet away from Jellico, and the cold voice said:

"Slug, Stretch and Jim, slip ashore with your flash lights and bring me anything human you find on this island. How's that water under the bow, skipper?"

"About four inches, Mr. Jellico."

Calmly: "Better back out a little, skipper."

Three men with pistols and flash lights came out of a doorway and scrambled over the rail to the pier. Ignoring Tommy, they trotted off into the darkness.

Dirk Jellico lighted a cigarette and contemplated Tommy Varden with cool contempt.

"So you're the baby that's been giving old man Cable the insomnia, eh? I'm willing to lay you a bet that he will sleep better after to-night. Want to know why, big boy?"

Tommy, nursing a sore spot on his jaw with his finger tips, wanted to spring over the rail and encircle Dirk Jellico's long slender neck with his ten fingers; squeeze it until those cobra eyes were popping. But he permitted himself only to say:

"You seem to be doing the talking, you rat."

For the first time, Dirk Jellico smiled. It was only a flicker of his lips, and it momentarily revealed teeth as white and small as a girl's.

"I do other things pretty well, too, Jack. If I wasn't just a little skeptical about one or two things in connection with you, I would let these two boys here turn you into lead pudding. I don't like you, but you interest me a little."

He stopped talking and looked at Tommy with a stare that was all but hypnotic, so steady and so expression-

less it was. Out of the tail of his eye, Tommy saw the blinking of the flash lights on the island—three busy fireflies. Slug, Stretch and Jim were evidently giving the key a thorough inspection.

"You don't look like a dick," Jellico was saying, "and then again you do. Well, no matter. I was talking about old man Cable's insomnia. He's a poor, lonesome old gentleman, Jack, and he loves his loneliness. He doesn't crave close neighbors. I guess that about sizes the situation up. He doesn't want you here—and I don't either. Your ears are too big and your eyes are too bright. So I'm going to give you one hour to pack up and blow. In one hour I'm coming back. If you're here then, you're going to lose five gallons of blood so fast you'll think all the surgeons in Florida have been operating on you."

He stopped. Men were coming out on the pier, playing their flash lights ahead of them. There were four men. One was Blue.

Once again Tommy saw that momentary flicker of mirth at Dirk Jellico's mouth.

"Well," Jellico drawled, in a broad imitation of Southern dialect, "whut's dis we got hyuh?"

Blue responded with a feeble, scared grin.

"Ah ain't done nuffin', white man. Ah ain't been botherin' nobuddy."

"Where at you-all workin', black man?"

"Ah's been workin' fo' Mr. Varden."

Dirk Jellico grinned again. "Whuf-fo' is Mr. Varden on dis island?"

"Ah don' know, suh," Blue answered, and his thick lips were parted in a grin of terror. "He's jes' restin'."

"Jes' restin'?" Jellico mocked.

"Yas, suh, dassall. Jes' restin'."

DIRK JELICO glanced at the tallest of Blue's three escorts.

"Find anything else, Stretch?"

"No," Stretch answered. "We combed every palmetto bush on the key. All we found was Ol' Black Joe. Found him hidin' under a cot in the cabin with a rod in his hand. We got the rod."

Dirk Jellico bent toward Tommy. He pounded softly on the rail with his fist.

"I'm coming back in an hour, Jack. Take a wise man's advice and hit the gravel before I get here. All right, skipper; give her the gun."

The powerful engines began to throb. The black hull slid smoothly out into the cove. Lights flashed along the cruiser's side as she turned, her searchlights burning fiery white holes through the darkness. The lights swept on toward Skeleton Key and twinkled through trees.

In a shaking voice, Blue said: "Mis-tot Tommy, dat white man is bad. Dat man's a killer. Whut he mean—comin' back in an hour?"

"He means," Tommy answered, "that if he finds me here in an hour, he's going to kill me."

"Whut did you do to him, suh?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out, Blue. I'm trying to figure out what I've done to anybody. I came to this key for rest and quiet a week ago. If I'm not gone by morning, old man Cable will chase me off with a shotgun. If I'm not gone in an hour, Dirk Jellico will shoot me full of holes."

"Whut you aimin' to do, boss?"

"I'm going."

"Sho!" the black man breathed.

"We better hit some ob dat gravel. Yas, suh. Whuh we all goin', boss?"

"I'm going to Skeleton Key. You're going to stay behind and deliver a message to Miss Cable when she comes."

"Dat gal comin' to dis key?"

"She may come before I return. You will wait here and tell her to go on to Green Harbor—that I will meet her at Ben Tupples."

"Misto Tommy, Ah don't like dat. Ah don't like to be left here alone. S'posin' dat Dirk Jellico comes befo' you do?"

"Would you rather go to Skeleton with me?"

"No, suh. Ah'd ruther go home and stay home. Ah don' like dis place and Ah don't like dis job."

"I won't be gone long."

"If you go over to dat key, boss, you may be gone forever. Where at's yo' rifle?"

"Jellico has it."

"And you mean to say, Misto Tommy, you gwine over to dat key without no gun?"

"Yes. Run up to the cabin and bring me some old rags and the spade."

Blue shuffled off toward the cabin and Tommy walked out to the end of the pier and gazed at Skeleton Key. In any light it had always looked forbidding. In the dim light of stars, the key was decidedly sinister.

Tommy's plans were as simple as they were dangerous. He would slip ashore in the darkness; he would go into the thicket where he now believed Captain John Varden's treasure was buried, and he would dig for it. It should take him no longer than an hour, to prove either that that famous iron chest was in existence, or had never existed. He had merely to find the circle of small rocks mentioned in the old pirate's letter—and dig.

The odds facing Tommy were incalculable. But on one point there could be no doubt: If he were discovered on Skeleton Key by old man Cable or any of Jellico's men, he would certainly be shot.

CHAPTER X.

WAR ON SKELETON KEY.

WHEN Blue returned, Tommy wrapped the oars with rags so they would make no sound in the oarlocks. He stowed the spade in the bottom of the boat, pushed off from shore and began to row. The night was absolutely still. The water in the bay was like a mirror on which reflections of shore lights at Green Harbor rested with perfect immobility. He heard the whistle of a train in the north, and guessed that the time was close to one o'clock, for a southbound train was due in Green Harbor at a little after one.

Tommy rowed swiftly. The tide was still falling when he entered Dead Man's Pass and was caught in that swift current. It carried him to a point a hundred feet beyond where he wished to land. He beached the boat, cautiously climbed out and looked about him.

A faint reddish glow in the east indicated that the moon would soon rise. He must hurry, to be away from Skeleton Key before the moon was very high.

He crept stealthily up the beach, walking in the smooth, hard sand near the water to avoid the crunching sounds his feet would make on the shells with which the beach higher up was strewn. His heart was thumping. From time to time he paused to look and listen. But he saw no lights and

heard no human sounds, and he presumed that old man Cable's house and his anchorage were at the other end of the island.

Suddenly he stopped with indrawn breath. He had reached the little point to which he had come in the Barracuda yesterday afternoon. Perhaps fifty feet beyond was a long, dark object, half in the water and half out—a log or a boat of some sort?

Tommy decided to investigate. He walked on and found that it was a rowboat. Presumably, it was the boat in which Joan Cable had rowed to Friendship Key earlier to-night.

He wondered why she had beached it here. Was the Cable house near here, or had she, for safety's sake, left the boat as far away from the house as possible? If this was Joan's boat, she would have to pass near the thicket in which he would be digging, and he could tell her to meet him in Green Harbor instead of on Friendship Key.

With the spade over his shoulder, Tommy entered the thicket. He mounted a flat knoll. His heart was beating rapidly, and his mouth was dry. The immediate problems of life narrowed and focused: somewhere in this knoll he must find Captain John Varden's iron chest. Having volunteered to accept the responsibility of Joan Cable—and the Vardens were famous for keeping their promises intact—he must take her north to his sister. He needed money. He needed thousands of dollars. Here, he must find the nucleus for the new Varden fortune—or what would happen to him.

Tommy found a stone. He found the sharp edge of it with his shin. He all but fell over it. But he did not mind. The discovery of that stone was worth the damage to his shin. With a shaking hand, he removed the

flash light from his hip pocket. Thick underbrush blocked the white beam. Tommy crawled under a palm—and found another stone, perhaps two feet in diameter. He found other stones.

The hammering of his heart increased. These stones unquestionably bore in a circle. They were sometimes a yard apart, sometimes two yards apart. Tommy followed them to the starting point.

IT was dangerous to use the flash light, but he shielded the ray with one hand, trying to discover where the center of the crude circle would fall. The circle, he estimated, was about twenty-five feet in diameter. Starting at the first rock he had found, he measured off, roughly, twelve and a half feet toward the other side. This brought him to a tall, elderly palm tree. The tree was perhaps fifty feet tall and more than a foot thick—a monarch among palm trees.

Tommy measured toward the center of the circle from another stone. Again, his measurement ended at the palm tree. He tried from the other side. Twelve feet in from each stone brought him invariably to the palm tree.

He seated himself on a stone to think it over. With less than a half hour at his disposal, how could he follow the instructions in his great-great-grandfather's letter? The letter said:

"In the heart of this circle, dig. Dig deep, my brother, until you strike a stout iron chest. Within ye chest is my personal fortune."

Tommy looked at the tree. He was more discouraged than at any time since he had started the treasure hunt. From time to time, in the course of the search, he had been convinced that Captain John Varden had, on his

deathbed, perpetrated a last practical joke. The old pirate had enjoyed a last chuckle at the thought of his crafty, greedy brother Ebenezer coming all this way, risking all the dangers of travel in those early days, to find, not an iron chest full of treasure, but a palm tree. Perhaps Captain John Varden had carried out his jest to the extent of planting this tree with his own hands.

The young man's bitter reflections were interrupted by a sound in the underbrush. Some one was coming toward him. Tommy stealthily arose. But he could see nothing. The faint rose glow of the rising moon was stealing over the sky.

Some one breathing rapidly, stumbling as he came, approached the thicket where Tommy stood, and went down onto the beach. Tommy crept to the edge of the knoll and looked. A dark figure was moving away from him on quick feet.

The moon, a pink bud on the Eastern skyline, shed sufficient light for Tommy to see that that dark figure was a girl. In one hand she carried a large square object—a box or a suitcase.

Tommy opened his mouth to call, but he did not call. Another sound in the underbrush checked him. Some one else was coming! Tommy waited. The unknown passed. A moment later, Tommy's nostrils began to quiver, as they were assailed by an unmistakable scent—a heavy, oily perfume. Tommy expelled his breath in an angry snort just as the man called out in a harsh voice:

"Joan! Wait a minute!"

The girl started to run. Tommy heard something that sounded like a sob come from her. Dirk Jellico called again:

"Joan, so help me, I'll shoot that boat full of holes!"

Dirk Jellico ran out on the beach. Tommy hesitated only a moment and followed.

JOAN was trying to push the boat into the water. Since she had pulled it up, the tide had receded, and the boat was evidently a heavy one. She pulled and pushed, but she could not free it. Tommy heard her panting as Jellico ran up to her.

Jellico said: "So you were going to run away from me."

Joan cried: "Don't you touch me, Dirk. Let me alone. Let me go."

Tommy heard the dapper little man chuckle, then the two vague figures merged. He heard the rapid gasping of Joan as he came softly running up. Jellico had seized her in his arms. Joan dropped the suitcase and tried to push him away. Then she screamed.

If Tommy Varden had had more experience with Dirk Jellico's type, he would not have acted as he now did. He would have struck the man with all the violence he could summon, in a single attempt at rendering him harmless. Instead of this, he seized Dirk Jellico by the shoulder, spun him away from Joan and facing himself. He thereby gave Dirk Jellico the advantage.

The "king of the rum smugglers" was quick to use it. From somewhere he miraculously produced a knife—the long, slender type that Italians carry. Quite as swiftly as he had struck before, he struck now. Tommy darted aside, felt the blade ripping through the flesh of his left forearm, and closed in. He drove his fists in a succession of quick blows into Jellico's face, and when Jellico staggered back, he leaped upon him and threw him to the ground.

Jellico landed on his back. He rolled over, and Tommy dropped upon him, intending to batter him into unconsciousness. Jellico had lost his knife; was now fumbling under one armpit for a pistol. The pistol came into view. Tommy snatched for it, but succeeded only in knocking the pistol out of the other's hand.

In the next few seconds, he was too busy to think about the pistol. Jellico had one wire-rope arm about his neck. With the thumb of his other hand he was attempting to gouge out Tommy's right eye. The vicious pain sent explosions of dizzy light into Tommy's brain. He smashed his fist into Jellico's face, and sprang up, looking for the lost pistol.

Jellico followed him up and sprang at him. Tommy met him with both fists and drove him back, toward the water. The smuggler was cursing. He managed to think up names to call Tommy that Tommy had never heard before. He yelled hoarsely: "Help!"

Tommy drove a fist into his face again. Jellico snarled, in a voice no longer soft and cold, but harsh and vindictive: "You'll get yours!" He added a stream of vileness.

Tommy hit him again, and followed that blow with a rush. The rush ended unexpectedly. It carried both himself and his antagonist into deep water. With one arm in a half-nelson about Jellico's neck, Tommy went down. When they came up, Jellico was sputtering and cursing. Tommy pulled him down again. The next time they came up, Tommy declared:

"You rat, I'm going to drown you!"

Dirk Jellico's response was a hoarse gurgle. In the following immersion, he became limp. When they came to the surface this time, Tommy started for shore. The current of the pass

was sweeping them out into the Gulf. He seized a handful of Jellico's greasy black hair and towed him to shore. He dragged him up on the beach and tossed him down. Jellico rolled over limply and lay sprawling on his back. He looked dead.

TOMMY heard shouts coming down the island, then saw the flicker of flash lights. There was no time now to look for treasure. He would have time only to meet Joan and row away to safety. But when he reached the rowboat, Joan was not there. The rowboat was as he had seen it last. Near by on the beach was Joan's suitcase. He called her name, and was answered by hoarse shouts of men.

A man came leaping out of the bushes. The moonlight showed Tommy that the man had a pistol in one hand, and that the man was the one known as Stretch.

Stretch fired. The bullet ripped past within inches of Tommy's head. He paused a moment longer, in indecision. If he leaped into the water and tried to swim to Friendship Key, he would make the easiest kind of target. Then he saw a small, gleaming lump of metal in the sand. It was Dirk Jellico's automatic.

Tommy pounced upon it as two more shots were fired by Stretch. Both bullets went over his head.

Tommy released the safety catch as he spun about and fired. If he aimed at all, it was at the approximate middle of the tall man's body. Tommy waited a split second. In that measureless interval of time, Stretch fell to the sand without a sound and the pistol went tumbling, muzzle over butt, down the sand.

In the bushes, a voice shouted:

"Dirk—Stretch—where in hell are you?"

Tommy ran to the recumbent man and picked up the pistol. He stared in amazement as a white shape moved into his range of vision from across the pass, and the Barracuda, with throttled engine, nosed up on the beach. Blue leaped out and came loping up the sand toward Tommy.

"Boss, somebuddy's on dat key. Ah was in de cabin when de prowler alarm made dat calf bell go jinglin' and a janglin'. And Ah wanted to be plumb close to you, suh."

Before Tommy could answer three men came charging out of the thicket. Pistols began to blaze. Tommy, with an automatic in each hand, fired in return. One man fell. That one Tommy recognized as Midge. The other two stopped. Tommy fired at them, saw one pitch forward. The other fired and retreated.

Blue, too, had fallen. He lay on his face, with his arms outstretched, a bubbling sound issuing from his lips buried in sand.

Tommy seized his man Friday by his shirt collar, with the intention of dragging him down the beach and aboard the Barracuda, but changed his plan promptly when he saw that the motor boat had backed off the sand and was slowly moving out into the current of the pass.

Dragging Blue, he crossed the beach and climbed the knoll. The strange bubbling sound was still coming from Blue's lips. Obviously, the black man had been shot in the lungs and was slowly bleeding to death.

The immediate future looked black for Tommy. He crouched down beside Blue and listened. The end of the island, it seemed, was swarming with men. He heard them shouting

back and forth, cursing; saw the flashes of their lights.

A MAN cried: "He ain't there. Him and the nigger have beat it."

Tommy straightened up and looked down the beach. A half dozen men suddenly swarmed into sight. They began firing at the Barracuda. Tommy heard the shattering of glass as bullets pierced portholes, and the thud of bullets against wood. And he was glad that he had not made his escape on the motor boat.

A man cursed and said: "He ain't out there. He's still somewhere on this island. Spread around and look—and shoot straight. He got Stretch, Midge and Slug. Where's Dirk?"

Another man answered: "I reckon he got Dirk, too."

"Well, get him," said a third. "And shoot straight!"

The six men vanished. Their flash lights began blinking. In the distance there was a shot, then more voices. Tommy heard:

"Nick thought he saw 'em. False alarm. Get that guy. Don't let him or that nigger off this island alive."

The lights blinked nearer, then worked toward the westerly end of the key. Presently Tommy heard more shouts. The first was quite distinct.

"Here's Dirk!"

Then: "He's drowned! He's dead!"

Silence followed. The bubbling breath of Blue rose and fell. Tommy did not dare even flash on his light to examine him, for the men were coming close again. Two of them paused, as if to consider plans. One said:

"I know I dropped that nigger. I seen him fall. Where could Varden have taken him?"

The other man replied: "He's here

somewhere. Watch your step. This reminds me of the time I made my getaway from Atlanta. You didn't know where a bullet was likely to come from. Every sound you heard was some dick with a rifle.

"I'll bet I grew twenty years older that one night."

Tommy held his breath. The two men were inching nearer. If they came too close, should he shoot—or hope that they would pass him by unnoticed?

The bubbling at Blue's lips grew louder.

One of the men, so close were they that Tommy could hear them breathing, whispered:

"You hear that?"

"You mean, that gurgling over in there?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I hear it. What is it?"

As if in answer, the bubbling sounded again. Tommy lifted his pistols in readiness. He had forgotten how many shots he had already fired from each one.

He tried to remember, but could not.

If these men did not discover him now, others would later. A light blinked on full in Tommy's face. He fired at it, heard a man grunt, then the sound of a falling body. A pistol roared three times.

The bubbling at Tommy's feet came more loudly.

It all but took on the coherence of spoken words.

With both pistols still raised, he peered into the darkness and waited. Somewhere in there a man was staring, waiting for some slight sound, to shoot at him.

Tommy squatted down. His arms were shaking. He discovered that his

entire body was trembling, and that he was wet with perspiration.

NOT five feet from him a pistol spurted red flame. The flame momentarily illuminated vaguely the face of a man. Tommy fired three times at the face; heard the man groan, then a crash among the foliage as he fell.

A long bubbling groan came from Blue. Tommy squatted down beside him and listened. The moon was now above the tops of the surrounding scrub palmettoes.

Tommy listened, but heard no sounds of further intrusion. He seated himself on a rock, laid both pistols across his knees, and mopped his face with a handkerchief. He felt faint and sick in the region of his stomach. Had he killed these two men—or were they now creeping toward him?

He tried to stand up, but could not. Either he was too weak to stand or he was paralyzed by the tension of the past half hour.

A sound came across the night to him, and puzzled him. It was the hum of a fast motor boat. And he wondered if some of Dirk Jellico's men had gone off in the black power cruiser, and were now returning.

The humming stopped. With the sweat of complete nervous exhaustion streaming down his face, Tommy waited and listened. How much time passed before the occurrence of the next startling event he did not know. The moon climbed higher, a moon so white that it was almost blue. He wondered what had happened to Joan. Had she been hurt or captured? And what had become of old man Cable?

His faintness increased. At his feet, Blue was dying. It occurred to Tommy that he would have considerable ac-

counting to do to the authorities. He had killed, or seriously injured, several men. True, he had shot at them in self-defense; but there would certainly be some kind of trial in which he would prominently figure. What would happen to him? And what would happen to Joan?

Tommy reached an important conclusion as he sat there, swaying with faintness and nausea, on the rock: that he was a fool. He was a fool to have wasted all this time searching for a treasure which had never existed except in the imagination of a practical joker of a pirate, dead these hundred years. He was a fool to have permitted Joan to return to this island. If he had taken her to Green Harbor instead of letting her return here for that suitcase full of clothing, this trouble would have been avoided.

HIS reflections were interrupted by a savage outburst of firing from the other end of the island. He sat up straighter and listened, wondering.

The firing he heard was the unmistakable stuttering *rat-tat-tat* of a sub-machine gun. It stopped, then began again.

In indecision, Tommy waited. His left forearm, where Dirk Jellico's knife had slashed it, was growing stiffer. That arm would presently be useless.

As the silence lengthened, his worry increased. Where was Joan? She was somewhere on this island. She had not returned to the rowboat. Any doubt that he loved Joan Cable was swiftly being removed.

The determination to find her presently drove him out of his hiding place. He came to a path.

Warily, he proceeded along it, toward the northern end of the key, paus-

ing now and then to listen. He wondered what had become of the rest of the men who were searching for him. He wondered what had been the reason for that intermittent firing of the sub-machine gun.

The brooding silence of the key was now interrupted by a series of slow, heavy explosions. These were neither pistol nor rifle shots. They were followed promptly by the savage barking of the sub-machine gun, then further slow, heavy explosions.

Through the trees, Tommy could now see the flash of them; and presently another sight greeted him. A red glow flickered through the trees. It gained in brightness until, over near the trees, Tommy saw red flames licking upward amidst a column of dense smoke which rolled heavenward in billows.

The sounds of machine gun firing and of the heavy slow explosions had stopped entirely.

Tommy ventured nearer the fire. In the moonlight and the light of the flames, he saw that a frame house was on fire. In a clearing he saw a number of men. They were running about. Several of them carried rifles.

His anxiety over Joan increased. He dared not stay here, yet he dared not leave.

A deep voice behind him barked: "Drop that gun and put up your hands!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF THE SEARCH.

TOMMY VARDEN obeyed. He dropped the automatic to the ground, slowly raised his hands and turned about. A tall man in dark clothing faced him. A fugitive ray of

moonlight played upon the longest-barreled revolver Tommy had ever seen.

But Tommy's audible gasp was not inspired by the length of the revolver barrel. Behind the revolver, faintly but definitely, he saw a double row of brass buttons!

"Coast Guard!" Tommy breathed.

"Stow your lip," snapped the tall man. "Turn around and walk straight ahead. If you make one funny move, big boy, you're going to get it right in the middle of your backbone. Forward march!"

Tommy marched. So great was his relief that he found himself laughing aloud. His nerves were suddenly jumping. He was suddenly so weary that he could hardly drag one foot after the other.

The man behind him presently shouted:

"Hey, chief! Here's another one!"

They entered the clearing. Another man in uniform, with a Sam Browne belt buckled over his coat, came toward Tommy. He was a stout, elderly man with a smartly trimmed gray mustache.

"Good, Mack," he boomed. "Where did you find this one?"

"Slinkin' through the bushes, chief. I guess this makes six, don't it?"

"Where," the elderly man inquired, "is Dirk Jellico? You've let the prize slip through your hands."

Tommy said in a faint voice: "No. I drowned Dirk."

"Oh," said the chief. "So you drowned Dirk."

"Yes, sir. We had a fight down on the beach at the other end of the island. He stabbed me in the arm. I beat him up, knocked him into the water—and I heard one of his men say that Dirk is dead. I kept him under water a long time."

"And who are you?"

"My name is Tom Varden. I own the key across the pass from this one. Where is Miss Cable?"

The official's skepticism made itself known in his mocking reply.

"Are you so deeply concerned over Miss Cable?"

"I am."

"Then you must be the 'Tommy' she has been asking for. Miss Cable is safe and intact. She is at present under arrest. What business, may I ask, are you in?"

Tommy sighed audibly with relief and truthfully answered: "I am engaged in the business of hunting treasure."

"Ah, yes," murmured the chief indulgently, "you are a treasure hunter," as if it were his pleasure daily to meet scores of treasure hunters. "So that accounts for your presence on this island."

"Yes, sir," said Tommy. "Strange as it may sound to you, I came to Florida a week ago for the express purpose of finding a treasure which an ancestor of mine is reputed to have buried on this key one hundred and thirteen years ago. While I was looking for the treasure to-night, the fight started."

THE gray-mustached man glanced back over his shoulder at the burning house. He looked about at the armed men in the clearing and said:

"You mean the fight in which you drowned Dirk Jellico?"

"The fight did not end there," said Tommy. "His men came after me. I shot them as we met on the beach and in the bush. I shot five or six of them."

"With an automatic pistol?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what range, may I ask?"

It was obvious that the chief was growing more and more skeptical.

"From six to thirty feet."

"You must be a crack shot."

"I won," Tommy replied, "the intercollegiate pistol championship during my sophomore year at Dartmouth."

"And you suffered no casualties?"

"Yes, sir. In a knife fight with Jellico, I had my left arm slashed open—here." He showed the bleeding wound to the chief. "And my negro manservant was shot. I left him back there in the bushes to find out what all this shooting was about."

The official stopped smiling. He looked with steady, rather fierce gray eyes into Tommy's face. He said to the tall man:

"Mack, without a doubt, this is the most preposterous story I have ever heard, and I have heard some wild ones. Are you sure that this young man is unarmed?"

"I'll make sure," grunted Mack. He searched Tommy systematically and found, in one pocket, the small pearl-handled automatic that had belonged to Dirk Jellico.

The chief examined the pistol with great interest, turning it over and over in his hands. He placed it in a pocket of his coat and said to Mack:

"Handcuff his hands behind him and let him lead you to the spot where the negro is. Let him point out to you, if possible, these various results of his crack marksmanship. If he can produce a drowned Dirk Jellico, five or six of Jellico's men, dead or wounded, and one negro shot through the lungs, we will begin to believe that wonders never cease in this humdrum world. That isn't a serious wound, is it?"

"No, sir," said Mack promptly; "nothin' but a flesh wound."

"I'd like to have my mind relieved on one point," Tommy said. "If you find that I have shot these men, will it get me into any trouble?"

The chief looked mystified. "Trouble?"

"I mean," Tommy explained, "will I be held on murder charges?"

The chief started to smile, but straightened his lips hastily. Very gravely he answered: "Take him along, Mack."

So Tommy suffered the indignity of having his hands manacled behind him.

"No tricks," the chief warned him, "or you'll be mighty sorry for it."

"March!" growled Mack.

Tommy started down the path toward the knoll. He said presently:

"There's something queer about this, Mack. Your uniform doesn't look exactly like the Coast Guard uniform."

"Stow your lip," growled Mack. "Do your talkin' to the chief. I know you smooth-tongued guys."

TOMMY relapsed into silence and walked on. He led his captor first to the knoll. The moon was now so high and so bright that a flash light was unnecessary. The flood of white light clearly revealed the scene as Tommy had left it. Beside the palm tree in the center of the circle of stones lay the spade and the negro. It was a silent scene.

Tommy said softly, regretfully: "I'm afraid he's dead. A man shot through the lungs doesn't last long, unless he's cared for."

A sustained bubbling issued from Blue's lips. Blue rolled over, sat up and blinked up at Tommy. There was no blood at his lips. He looked singularly intact.

He stared at the officer and gulped.

Then he stared at Tommy and gasped: "Who's dat, boss?"

"That," said Tommy, "is a revenue officer. They came here to capture Dirk Jellico and his gang. I'm under arrest as one of them."

Blue's mouth fell open.

"Say which, boss?"

Tommy repeated what he had said and added: "I thought you were shot. I thought you got a bullet through one of your lungs."

"No, suh; I wasn't shot. I was jes' nervous. Dassall—jes' nervous."

"This," growled Mack, "sounds fishy to me. Stand up, you."

"Yas, suh, officeh." Blue stood up. Mack found another pair of handcuffs and locked Blue's hands behind him.

"You two birds stand together. I've got you both covered. The first funny move either of you make, you're going to get it. Now, where are all these guys you shot?"

"Two of them," Tommy answered, "are over there to the right."

"Show me!"

"Part those palms."

Mack parted the palmettoes Tommy indicated and uttered a grunt. He stooped down. He gave an even more pronounced grunt. He swore. He came back to Tommy.

"Say," he growled, "are you kidding me? Did you shoot both these guys?"

"I did. Are they dead?"

"They're dead, all right. Do you know who they are?"

"I do not," said Tommy.

Mack stared at him with suspicion and amazement.

"You didn't know that one of them was Chicago Pete, and the other one, Two-Time Billy?"

"The names," said Tommy, "mean nothing to me. You'll find several

more of them down on the beach. This way."

Tommy led the way. Mack's amazement increased when they reached, first, the inert form of the tall one known as Stretch.

"Where were you," Mack demanded, "when you shot this feller?"

"Down there by that boat."

"Was the moon up?"

"Enough to see by."

"You mean to say, you stood there and shot it out with Stretch Lenihan?"

"I didn't know who he was, but I shot it out with him, yes."

"You certainly," breathed Mack, "deserved that medal you won. Where's the others?"

"A little farther around the point."

These last two of Tommy's bag drew forth more exclamations of wonderment from the amazed Mack. One, he announced, was Slug Fitch; the other, Midge Martin. Both were breathing. Midge Martin was conscious. His ratlike eyes fixed upon Tommy's face. He tried to talk, but could not.

MACK said, somewhat reluctantly, to Tommy: "I guess that story of yours is on the level, after all." He unlocked the manacles on Tommy's wrists, and he unlocked Blue's. He said to Blue:

"Carry these two guys to the end of the island. Tell the chief I told you to. Take Midge first. I don't think Slug has a chance. Now, where did you say Dirk was?"

"Around this point," Tommy answered.

They walked around the point and found that Dirk Jellico was not dead, but sitting up, or trying to sit up. He looked up at Tommy and made feeble strangling sounds in his throat. He weakly waved his hands.

Mack slung Jellico over his shoulder as if he were a sack of flour and they started back toward the burning house.

"It still don't seem reasonable to me," Mack enviously complained, "that one guy did so much damage to this gang. Believe me, big boy, you're goin' to deserve all you got comin' to you. Don't you try to get away from me."

"Look here," said Tommy anxiously, "is there apt to be much fuss over this?"

"You bet your sweet life there's goin' to be a fuss!"

Tommy's bitterness returned. It didn't seem fair. He had come to Florida to recover his health, to get away from people and to look for buried treasure. And instead of the peace and solitude which he felt he so richly deserved, what had happened? He had been hounded by old man Cable; he had been shot at and stabbed by a gang of cutthroat rum smugglers—and he would now be dragged into a courtroom to stand trial for numerous murders. Self-defense? Of course; but it wasn't as simple or as easy to prove as it sounded.

Tommy's alarm grew. After all, rum runners were not looked upon as such vicious criminals by easy-going American juries. Had he not shot them while he was trespassing upon property either belonging to them or to their close friend? Yes, Tommy reluctantly admitted, he had. Tommy knew little or nothing of court procedure, but he knew that Justice was a tricky lady; that fantastic results were often reached by murder trial juries. What if he were found guilty of murdering innocent men? They weren't smuggling rum, breaking the law, when he killed them, were they? Indeed, they weren't.

Tiny beads of cold sweat were forming on Tommy's brow. His anxiety was momentarily distracted by sounds which Dirk Jellico was making. Damn Dirk Jellico! It was Dirk Jellico who had precipitated this evening's madness.

Dirk Jellico was trying to say something. After many efforts, what he said was:

"You'll get yours for this, you—you—"

Tommy tramped on in silence. Dirk Jellico would doubtless hire brilliant legal talent; would make every effort to persuade some sentimental jury to punish Tommy.

DIRK JELLICO continued to curse Tommy.

"I knew you were a dick!"

"I wish," said Tommy irritably, "that I'd drowned you."

"Dead or alive," said Mack cheerfully, "you'll get the same, big boy."

That didn't make sense to Tommy. Dirk Jellico was gulping painfully. He presently said, in a wheedling tone:

"Boys, let's be sensible. You—you fix it up for my get-away, and I'll make you both rich. You know my reputation."

"Sure, we know your reputation," growled Mack. "You would knock over a dying widow to steal a dime from a starving orphan. Stow it. You're talking to gentlemen, you rat."

Dirk Jellico began talking more freely. He threatened. He begged. He cursed.

His captors ignored him. Tommy was thinking of the sweet solitude which might have been his on Friendship Key. Of all the events which had conspired against his peace, of only one was he thankful. He was thankful that he had met Joan Cable. She was worth

all this trouble, and all the trouble that the future held in store for him. His worries increased. It was not beyond the bounds of possibility that some sentimental jury might convict him—electrocute him. No, they didn't electrocute men in Florida; they hanged them. Tommy shivered, felt his neck.

When they reached the clearing, Tommy noticed, with slight interest, that the burning house had caved in; was now hardly more than a mass of flaming timbers and pinkly glowing ash. Palms about the clearing, ignited by sparks and flaming brands, were blazing like torches. It was, it occurred to him, a fitting stage setting for the last scene in a lurid, outrageous melodrama.

Men walked about, with golden lights gleaming on rifles and sidearms.

Then the gray-mustached man came breathlessly trotting up and Mack said:

"Well, chief, the boy was telling the naked truth, all right. Here's Dirk, himself. He wasn't quite drowned—worse luck! Has that nigger brought in Midge and Slug?"

"Yes. I've got the surgeon working over them. Midge may pull through. Slug won't live an hour."

Tommy's morale sank another notch. Another murder charge to stand trial for!

Mack stood Dirk Jellico on his feet. The man with the cobra eyes was no longer dapper. He looked wilted. Only his large diamonds sparkled with their usual freshness.

The chief placed his face close to Dirk's, and said softly: "So you and I meet again!"

Dirk's reply was a torrent of vindictive abuse, of scorching profanity. The chief stepped back, chuckling.

"Take him down to the boathouse with the others, Mack. You'd better

chain him to a roofpost until we're ready to load them all aboard."

WHEN Mack had started off toward the boathouse, firmly propelling Dirk Jellico by the arm, the chief held out his hand to Tommy. He said briskly:

"Mr. Varden, let me congratulate you. In subduing this gang single-handed, as you did, you performed a deed of great daring. You are a brave man."

"It wasn't bravery," Tommy answered. "I got caught in a corner and had to shoot my way out. I don't want any credit for bravery. But I would appreciate some assurance that I won't be hanged for murder."

The chief's smile went away. He repeated, with a mystified air, "Murder?"

"After all," Tommy said rapidly, "the typical American jury doesn't think that the typical rum smuggler is a very vicious character. They're more apt to think he's a romantic, reckless adventurer. He is defying a law that many people are not sympathetic with, anyway. Besides, I killed these men on their own property. I was trespassing. What worries me is, how will I stand in court?"

The chief's air of mystification vanished. A light of understanding appeared in his face, and he said: "You've thought all along, have you, that these men are rum runners?"

"Aren't they?" Tommy gasped.

"They represent," the chief answered, "a collection of the most dangerous criminals in the South. I'll enlighten you. Dirk Jellico has for five years been wanted for murder in San Antonio, Texas. He has been the head of one of the most predatory, one of the most successfully organized bands

of crooks we ever had in the South. He has directed and engineered a score of pay roll, bank, train and jewelry store holdups. Long before that, he was using this island as his base. Here he has come and planned out his attacks. He comes mighty close to being the criminal 'master mind' of fable. His brains have planned and his gang have executed some of the most daring and dangerous and successful exploits in the criminal history of the South. You didn't know what a hornets' nest you were stepping into, did you, Mr. Varden?"

"No," breathed Tommy. "Then you aren't a Coast Guard officer?"

"I am the chief of police of Key West. I have been working on this case for the last two years and a half. Dirk Jellico's last coup was the Seventh National Bank of Key West hold-up. We suspected that he would come to this island. We knew that old man Cable had been acting as a fence for Heaven knows how many years—receiving the jewelry and unregistered bonds which Jellico from time to time delivered to him, making occasional trips north to dispose of such loot. The details, if you are interested, I'll gladly tell you on the trip back to Key West. I am afraid you'll have to come along. We'll need your testimony, and of course you'll want to collect your rewards. They should amount to a comfortable little fortune, Mr. Varden. On Jellico alone, there must be posted at least fifty thousand dollars. I should say that you will collect, at the very least, a hundred thousand."

Tommy Varden looked dazed. He said:

"Is that money legally mine?"

The chief of police nodded, and smiled. "As a treasure hunter, I should say you've so far had pretty

fair luck. If you want about two hours to look for the rest of your treasure, I can spare you that much time. I'll warn you that you're going to be kept mighty busy in criminal court rooms for the next few months."

TOMMY thanked him and said: "Where is old man Cable?"

The chief pointed to the smoldering ruins of the house.

"In there. When we came ashore from our boat, he met us with a volley from a machine gun he had mounted in an upstairs window. He got three of my men before we found cover. We thought we could bomb him out. A dozen bombs went into that house before he stopped firing. The blaze was so well under way by that time that it was impossible to enter the house. I think the last bomb killed him.

"It seems to me that the real victim of all this is this girl who is known as Joan Cable. She is supposed to be his granddaughter, but my records prove that he never had a daughter or a son, let alone a granddaughter. He served twenty years in San Quentin penitentiary on a murder charge and then vanished. Obviously, he came here. The girl will probably always remain a mystery. She is totally bewildered by all that has happened. And she is still suffering from a blow she received on her head.

"According to her story, which I believe, she ran up from the beach when you started fighting with Dirk, to get a gun and help you. But on her way out of the little bungalow where she and her colored mammy have been living, she stumbled and struck her head. I had a long talk with her. One of my men is talking to her now. I suppose you're anxious to see her."

The chief smiled.

"I've got to see her," said Tommy.

"Well, give my man another hour with her. It's cruel, keeping you two separated, but it will save trouble later if we can establish now beyond doubt that she had utterly no knowledge of what this island was really being used for. Will you give me that hour?"

HE gave it, reluctantly. But then, he had an excellent use to which to put that hour. He struck off down the path to the southern end of the key, and when he reached the knoll he picked up the spade and began to dig feverishly at the roots of the palm tree. If Captain John Varden had not been playing a practical joke, that iron chest would be found enmeshed in the roots.

His digging became less and less feverish. And presently it stopped entirely. Tommy seated himself on a rock and contemplated the tree. Then he looked at the spade and grinned.

Was that treasure there or wasn't it? He walked down upon the beach and hurled the spade as far as he could into Dead Man's Pass.

Said Tommy to himself: "With the rewards I'll collect for to-night's activities, I'll have the nucleus I need for the new Varden fortune. Some day I'll be a rich man. And I'll have sons. And they will have sons. And some

day the Varden fortune will come to an end again. When it does, some other Varden can come looking for the captain's iron chest. Some day, my curiosity may get the better of me. I may weaken and come sneaking down here to satisfy it. But I'll try not to. I'll let my great-great-grandson find out whether or not his great-great-great-great-grandfather, John Varden, played a practical joke on him—or left him the nucleus of the *next* Varden fortune."

Tommy retraced his steps to the end of the island. He went to the bungalow and found Joan standing in the doorway. She came running out to meet him—an excited girl with a white bandage about her head.

Tommy took her in his arms and kissed her. After a moment, he said: "You're going to see your first city tomorrow. Key West!"

"Yes, darling," said Joan.

The moon was setting and there was a pink glow in the east. And it occurred to Tommy Varden that he had not recognized good fortune when it had come intruding on his island. To think that he had ever wanted solitude!

The Key West chief of police came strolling down the path. He asked:

"Did I give you time enough to find your treasure?"

"Yes," said Tommy.

THE END.





*Her eyes had
him punch-
drunk*

One Ton Kelly

*When a box-fighter begins mixing romance
with his fist-work, he's simply begging
to have disaster—and his oppo-
nent—slap him down*

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

REMEMBER One Ton Kelly, all brawn and a yard wide?

Well, Kelly and I went down to California where the weather was unusual, meanin', in the dialect of the native sons, that it was damp and rainy as customary. Disembarking from the train Kelly immediately sticks his arm out like a traffic cop and points in a direction due north of the depot.

"Look!" he bellows. "Let's eat over there."

The place had more fancy tilin' than a movin' picture queen's bathroom but it suited Kelly so in we went. A sloe-eyed brunette slunk over to take his order. Me? I just said: "Coffee and rolls." I never eat much, between meals anyhow.

"Lady," I was forced to remark

when the so-called rolls arrived, and I had cracked the enamel off of my front teeth tryin' to gnaw into one, "what are these?"

"Rolls," she snapped, turnin' her undivided attention to Kelly.

"Well," I said, "they must of been baked in a stone quarry."

With that Kelly grabs one off my plate and bites it into two pieces, one of which he swallows. Then he looks up smilin' to the dame, before castin' a dirty scowl my way.

"Sure they're rolls," he said. "Nice fresh ones too. I'm kind of surprised at you, Mr. Webster, actin' that way."

I choked on my coffee, and listened to Kelly makin' further headway. The girl told him her name was Pansy and that she had first come to California

to break out on the silver screen in the no longer silent drama.

Kelly believed it. I could tell by the way he was tiltin' his head back between mouthfuls and gazin' up at her. Them eyes of hers had him punch drunk.

Finally Kelly gulped his coffee and wiped his chin. He was ready to go, but the girl leaned low across the table so her brown eyes could look straight into Kelly's blue ones.

"If I may ask," she asked, "what line are you in, Big Boy?"

Kelly sort of grinned uneasily. Not that he was ashamed of prize fightin', but it always embarrassed him when girls asked what a big, healthy man like him done for a livin'.

"I give boxin' exhibitions," he stammered.

"Oh!" gasped the brunette like she was taken by surprise and horror, and the way I figured it she was no friend of mine and not ever likely to be, so I felt I owed it to Kelly to put her right about his fistic prowess.

"Ma'am," I said, pushin' my chair back from the table and reachin' for my hat, "the young man to whom you have been addressin' yourself is none other than One Ton Kelly, proud knight of the squared circle, so-called; bold warrior of the rosined ring. In short, madam, a professional prize fighter by trainin' and instinct, and you should see the wallop he has got when it lands on somebody's button."

"Oh, oh, oh!" The dame's breath was gone, she looked that shocked.

"And," I went on while I was at it, "Mr. Kelly and his manager, Mr. Daniel Webster, which is me, have came to this drum to smear the local fight arena with a grand and highly advertised false alarm of local lineage, a pugilist known as Frisco Ike."

This time she didn't even say, "Oh." Just stared hard at Kelly, then swung around and made a dash for the kitchen.

"GEE," said Kelly, when we were outside, "you shouldn't of told her all that stuff. Maybe she doesn't like prize fighters."

"Maybe she doesn't," I retorted. "What do you care?"

We walked about two blocks in awkward silence before Kelly cracks that anyhow he thinks she's a mighty fine girl, and how tough it must have been for her comin' out to go in the movies and bein' double crossed by a lousy director.

"Did she tell you that?" I barked.

"Yep," said One Ton solemnly, "and I believe every word of it." He looked at me kind of funny. "Don't you?" he added, suddenly edgin' me in toward the plate glass window of a drug store we was passin'.

"Me? Hell, yeah!" I said, at the same time makin' up my mind that Pansy's was one restaurant we wouldn't eat in again, anyhow not till after the fight. I didn't want no love-sick moon calf cavortin' around the ring and gettin' pasted in the smeller by this Frisco Ike, who from what I had heard, was pretty tough.

Heavyweights as willin' and conscientious as One Ton are almost as hard to find as they are hard to train afterward.

In the mornin' I went around to the local stadium to see about dressin' rooms and such, and I told Kelly to stick close to the hotel while I was gone, because there was a lot of money bein' put up by Frisco's backers, and I was afraid that some gamblin' racketeers, knowin' we had Frisco stopped in the first round, might come along

in a high-powered car and kid-snatch him if he wandered far from the hotel.

When I got back Kelly was in his room, lyin' on the bed moanin'.

"She's gone. She's gone," he kept repeatin'.

"Who's gone?" I said. "And where to?"

"Pansy," groans the big sea cow, "and I don't know."

"Listen," I said, kind of sharp and tellin' him to snap out of it, "this love at first bite is gettin' my goat. We got work to do. You've got a big fight comin' off in a few days that'll give you plenty to think about. I heard a lot about this guy Frisco's brand of sluggin' from a guy I was talkin' to that used to be his trainer and—"

It was no use. One Ton wasn't listenin'.

"I went down to that restaurant this mornin'," he explained, "and Pansy was gone. The guy that ran the place didn't know where to, or where she was livin' or nothin'."

"What am I supposed to do?—break down and cry?"

Kelly just looks up at me like a hurt Newfoundland puppy.

"No," he says. "Go out and try and find her for me. The man at the restaurant said she said her last name was McCoy, or McGeehan or something like that. He wasn't sure."

It was no use arguin' with Kelly so I went out and spent the afternoon around a lot of local pool parlors, findin' out what I could about this guy Frisco. When I came back and told Kelly that Pansy must have left town, I didn't know whether to feel sorry for him, or just mad at him. He was heartbroke.

But I'll hand it to Kelly. He plunged into trainin' like a man with a great sorrow that he was anxious to forget,

and he done fine work, growin' faster on his feet and improvin' his left jab considerably.

The fight with Frisco was set as the feature attraction on an all star card and because of the rep that the local sock slinger had in fistic circles, I figured that if One Ton planted him for the count, or even smacked a good decision out of him, it would be time to call in the newspaper boys and talk turkey.

PERSONALLY I hate alibi experts, but it wasn't altogether One Ton's fault what happened. In the third round he was doin' about as well as he done in the others and no one could tell which way the bout would go. The fans were gettin' their money's worth, and I could see that so long as Kelly kept his eyes open and his mouth shut, this guy Frisco wasn't nothin' to be terrified at.

Bong! The gong inaugurated the fourth stanza and both mugs was millin' around, swingin' kind of wild but hopin' to land the haymaker, that the frenzied customers was yellin' for. The sluggin' when it connected was vicious.

All of a sudden above the general din a female voice pipes up from down near the ring in the five-fifty seats;

"Soak him! Crown him! Paste him again!"

Somethin' clicks in my memory. It's a voice I've heard before only last time it was sayin', "Oh, oh, oh!"

Kelly recognizes it too. It's Pansy; and One Ton, forgettin' everythin' else, turns his head to see where she is sittin'.

That turnin' of his pan was the turnin' point in the fight. Frisco takes advantage of Kelly's averted eyes to slap him a terrific wallop on the kisser.

When Kelly come to, they must have been sweepin' out the place and pickin' up the empty pop bottles. I know I didn't wait.

In the mornin' I went around to see him. He was in his dressing gown and eatin' breakfast off the breakfast table in one corner of his room-and-bath. His jaw looked pretty bad.

"Listen, Kelly," I said. I was still boilin' over. "What was the idea of lettin' that bum smack you on the kisser like he did?"

Kelly wasn't interested.

"Gee," he said, "I'm nuts about that kid, Pansy. Think of her comin' to see me fight. Gee, and what a mug I turned out to be too. Gee!"

Suddenly his usually frank eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Say, Mr. Webster," he said, "I thought you said she had left town."

"She must have come back," I explained.

"Well," Kelly kind of spruced up, "you go find her for me and I'll lick Gene Tunney for you. Honest I will."

He meant it too. I seen then by the light in his eyes and the way his fists clenched nervously, open and shut, open and shut, that there was more truth than applesauce in his words. After all, Kelly was young. Just a kid and sentimental. He had to have an incentive to knock another guy's block off. Like them knights of old, he craved a lady fair to do battle for.

Well, I wished his heart would of picked out another jane than this Pansy wench, but I promised Kelly I'd find her for him this time sure.

I went all over town with a fine tooth comb, the police department and a city directory, but I couldn't locate no Pansy McCoy or McGeehan, except one of the latter who was built like a featherbed and took in washin'.

I was just about goin' back empty-handed when an idea hit me between the eyebrows. It was a pip, too.

"Sure," I told Kelly, when I was back in his room, "it was a hard job and at first she wouldn't scarcely speak to me. But I found her."

"Where is she?" shouts Kelly.

"Not so fast," I said. "She's sore because you lost that last fight and won't speak to you or have nothin' to do with you until you lick Frisco Ike to a frazzle."

"Lick him? I'll kill him next time," said Kelly. Then his voice got real earnest. "Do you think you can get another fight for me with Frisco?" he asked.

"I'll try hard, kid," I said, not tellin' him that I had already approached Frisco's manager on the subject and it was practically jake with them. Trifles like the time and place and the gate division bein' all that remained to be settled.

That was fixed up in about a week, and I was so happy the way the kid was smackin' into his sparrin' partners an' all, that in a careless moment I pulled a blunder.

EVERY evenin' I'd tell Kelly a little bedtime tale all about an imaginary interview I had had with this Pansy frail, and how she was expectin' great things of him. It was a dirty trick but it was gettin' nice results. Say, One Ton could of licked his weight in wildcats, and he was a heavy man, what I mean. He used to coax for her address, but I said I had promised not to divulge the secret until after the fight, and he had to be contented with that for an answer.

But the slip that I made was one day when Kelly was feelin' kind of blue and still sort of ashamed of him-

self for letting Frisco paste him in the kisser the way he done and without thinkin' the words slipped out of my mouth.

"Never mind, kid," I said. "Pansy—this is a secret now and don't tell nobody—said that maybe if you wiped up the deck with Frisco she might marry you."

"What!" Kelly jumped up and threw his arms around me. "Did she really say that, Mr. Webster?"

I seen right away I had went one too far, that time, but it was too late to back out.

"Sure, she did," I said. "She's nuts about you."

Well the days went by one by one, and as it got close to the time for our return engagement with Frisco Ike, I began gettin' nervous, wonderin' how Kelly would take it when he found out the truth about this Pansy female. I meant to tell him before the fight but I didn't have the heart to, he was so set on annihilatin' Frisco for the sole benefit and satisfaction of this lady love of his.

Originally the scheme seemed simple and harmless. But in those last few minutes before the bell rang, I began to have some misgivings. Maybe it wasn't goin' to turn out so hot after all.

"Gee," said Kelly to me in the dressin' room, while a couple of boys was tapin' his hands and rubbin' his legs down with alki, "Pansy is beautiful, ain't she?"

"Yeh," I said. "Now don't forget that this egg Frisco is a mean baby with belly punches."

"Her voice tinkles like cracked ice in a glass, don't it, Mr. Webster?" goes on Kelly.

"Yeh," I said sort of sharp. "Play for the stomach yourself."

"Huh?" says Kelly. Then he smiles weakly. "Oh, you was talkin' about Frisco."

"I was!" I snapped. "And you're goin' to be fightin' him in about five minutes."

Kelly jumped up. "I'm ready," he shouted. "Is Pansy out there to-night?"

"Not yet," I said, takin' a chance. "Don't you go lookin' for her after the bell rings, neither. Remember what happened last time."

"I will," said Kelly.

"You will what?" I roared.

"I mean I won't, I'll remember," replied Kelly.

It was too much for me. I left the dressing room. In two minutes I was back to give him a final warnin' not to think about anythin' durin' the approachin' combat, just to plaster Frisco Ike all over the place.

I had to tell him that. There ain't anybody fonder of Kelly than I am. He's a nice kid, a fine kid. He's just one of those guys who can't think and do anythin' else at the same time.

When we come out under the flood-lights I tried to look around and see if I seen Pansy myself, but I couldn't locate her in the short chance I got.

KELLY opened up with a mad rush. Smack, smack! One, two. Frisco didn't know what hit him as he bounced bewildered off the mat and heard the mob yellin' with excitement. Frisco came back onto his feet all right. But he was a little more wary, and Kelly kept carryin' the battle to him. Kelly was a fightin' fool that round. Another like it and an infant in arms could of seen that he would of had the fight in the bag.

In fact I could see by the expression on the referee's pan that he was gettin'

ready to hoist Kelly's palm up high, announce him winnah and go home early.

The bell rang before Frisco was sure whether he was fightin' just one man or a flock of mad pachyderms.

"Say," said Kelly as I was tellin' him what great stuff he was pullin' but addin' he must be careful and not let Frisco slip over a lucky sock on him, "do you suppose Pansy seen that? Where is she? Ain't she here yet?"

I tried to point out several good-lookin' females among the cash customers, tryin' to fool him. It wasn't any good. "That ain't her," said Kelly as he stared hard at each one of them.

It was time for the second spasm so I kicked the stool away and pushed Kelly into the battle. He didn't do so good that stanza but whether it was him, or just that Frisco was gettin' cautious, I couldn't make out.

When One Ton came back to his corner, I seen it was the former. Pansy was settin' heavy on his mind. In the third Frisco seen somethin' was wrong with Kelly again but he didn't know what, and didn't wait to find out. He wasn't that curious, bein' sufficiently happy to work his fists to good advantage.

I was settlin' to a comfortable crouch, when I seen what happened. The clout on the chin must have been swift and sudden while Kelly was day-dreamin' again. He didn't get up till they had counted eight on him. Then he did some slow bicycle racin' for a while and the bell saved him.

The fans were uproarious, but I was sweatin', and I laced into Kelly plenty while the boys was spongin' the blood off his face from a cut over the left eye. It didn't do no good. He was worse in the fourth and the fifth was a massacre.

"Listen," I whispered to Kelly, before he staggered to his feet for more punishment, "I just got a phone call from Pansy. She's been delayed, but she's on her way."

"Honest?" said Kelly, brightenin' up for the first time since the second round.

"No foolin'," I said.

It was amazin' the effect of a harmless white lie on that boy's fightin'. The sixth was a draw. The seventh stanza was easily his, makin' three for Kelly, three for Frisco and a knockdown apiece.

The fans were gettin' their money's worth and then some. They appreciated it, too. The old stadium was a bedlam of yells and I figured that even if this Pansy jane was in the mob you couldn't of heard her.

In the eighth Kelly slowed up again, but the punishment he had been handin' Frisco was beginnin' to tell, which was all that saved One Ton and made the round a draw.

"Kelly," I said, playin' my last ace, "Pansy phoned again and says if you win she'll go with you and buy the ring."

One Ton's face lit up like a kid that has just shook hands with Santa Claus. The second the bell rang he stepped over to Frisco, and I could see he was goin' to smear him, but he was too eager. Frisco caught him an awful wallop in the breadbasket, and I was glad One Ton was a clean-livin' lad or he would have doubled up then and there. As it was I seen his face twist with pain, but he was game and come right back at Frisco with a right uppercut that landed where it was aimed at.

But that was all. Smack! Blood spurted from a gash under Kelly's other eye. It began to swell. Crack! Bang! Two to the ribs. Kelly grunted.

Frisco was beginnin' to enjoy the slugfest, now that the party was goin' his way. Kelly was logy, punch-drunk, bleedin' and actin' like he didn't care when that nightmare of a ninth was finally over.

I'd of given a thousand dollars cash for that pipin' female voice of Pansy's right then.

"PANSY ain't comin'," moaned Kelly, as the boys sponged the blood off his face and worked over him. "She don't care."

Well, the tenth and last round started off worse than the end of the ninth. Nothin' seemed to rouse Kelly. He was in a fog, and kept on his feet more by good luck than good management. The fans were beginnin' to get ready to go home and I was sayin' to myself that this is what comes of lyin' to a nice boy like One Ton.

Kelly was droppin' his guard. His left eye was so swollen he couldn't hardly see.

And then out of a clear sky a thin female voice pipes up: "Kill him, crown him! Smack him for the count, papa! Drop him, you can do it."

Say, I could of married Pansy myself for them words, and there she was standin' in the aisle, way down front. Everybody seen her. But Kelly first of all. It was wonderful. Every word made a new man out of One Ton, brought strength into his wallops and filled up the hollowness that had been in his legs.

Kelly came out with another stiff uppercut that caught Frisco where it was meant to, and the latter staggered back, then leaned forward. He tried to hang on long enough to find out what happened, but Kelly was in no mood for a dancin' lesson. He broke away and swung a left that missed and

gave Frisco a chance to plant a lucky one on his jaw.

One Ton carried by his own momentum more than the wallop on the jaw hit the deck face down. He was breathin' hard, but I could see his face. He was smilin' and squintin' along the floor toward Pansy.

When he got up he was like chained lightnin'. Frisco knew it too, and his face wore a strange and pained expression. He couldn't understand bein' rushed off his feet by a guy he had knocked out once and had practically licked again a few seconds before. He tried coverin' up, hopin' for the final bell to save him, but Kelly landed a wallop that left him dazed and glassy-eyed.

The fans were on their feet, standin' on the seats, slappin' each other on the back, and still Pansy stood there in the middle of the aisle, yellin' her pretty little head off.

Frisco was gettin' plenty. He reached forward and tried to hang on. The crowd was screamin' for a knockout, as the referee tore the two men apart. Kelly, the light of blood and battle shinin' in the unclosed part of his eyes swung forward. The impact was a crash, slow but heavy. Frisco sank against the ropes which sagged and bounced him back into the ring.

As Frisco, half out already, rode toward Kelly, impelled in that direction by the rebound from the ropes, Kelly side-stepped the outstretched hand and planted a sweet left to Frisco's belly that bent him forward head down. With the speed that nobody would of believed an ox his size capable of, Kelly came back with a crack that snapped Frisco's sagging head back on his shoulders and lifted his whole body clear off the ground at least four inches.

What a clout! It was all that Kelly had, but it was championship stuff.

Frisco was out cold as a herring.

THERE was thirty seconds' deep silence before the crowd broke out into a cheer as the referee snapped out of it and yanked Kelly's hand up in the air, holdin' it there himself because Kelly didn't have the strength left to do it.

Down in the aisle Pansy gasped out loud.

"Oh, oh, oh my!" she screamed.

Tellin' the boys to hurry Kelly into his dressin' room, I dashed through the crowd to get to Pansy first. Right then she was a jane I wanted to talk to, and I had some explainin' to do also.

I didn't have to go far because she was elbowin' her way up to the ring on her own, and when she come up to me she gave me such a nasty shove

that it nearly spilled me over the empty seats.

"Out of my way, bum," she shouts, givin' me the dirtiest kind of a look.

Speechless? Say, I just stood there, my mouth openin' and shuttin' like a fish, lettin' the air in and out.

Pansy dashed on past two ushers, and I heard one of them say: "Say, Fred, I wonder why Pansy was so late to-night."

My ears stuck out like a stop-go sign.

"Yeh," the other guy comes back, "Frisco is sure a lucky guy to have a wife like that always rootin' and cheerin' for him. She's a swell looker too."

Me? I didn't wait.

Yeh, I sent Kelly his share of the profits by messenger in the mornin'. It was easier, kind of—and safer.

No. It was six months before I seen him again.

THE END.



A Rodent' Practical Joker

"I'LL bet a blankety-blank pack rat got it!" Such is the common expression used to account for any missing small article in regions where the pack rat makes his home. And if the missing article is something of value, say a ring, and in its place is found a twig or a frayed bit of shoe-lace, it is almost certain that a pack rat got it.

This queer little creature is an inveterate practical joker and thief, seeming to act on the theory that it isn't wrong to take anything you can carry away, just so long as you leave something in its place—hence it is also known as the trade rat. Urged on by its dominant instinct of hoarding, a pack rat will work like a stevedore all night long taking the buttons out of mamma's sewing basket and replacing them with beans from the pantry. Or else it will laboriously filch all the small change from papa's Sunday vest and substitute shiny lumps of coal. Sometimes the creature secretes purloined articles in its nest, but just as often it hides them about the house.

The pack rat is found in the southern and western parts of the United States and in parts of Canada and Mexico. It is more attractive than the common rat, and lacks its vicious look.

Vincent B. Wilson.



He dropped as suddenly as if he had been tripped

The Hawk of Hazard

Allan Campbell, dashing adventurer of the days before the Civil War, pits his Southern chivalry against a deadly frontier plotter

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

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LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ALLAN CAMPBELL, Mississippi gentleman, has been adventuring for several years with his enormous slave Tangle-eye. His extreme sense of gentlemanly honor, his disregard for danger, and his deadliness with the pistol have won him a wide but unfair reputation; all the river, in these antebellum Eighteen-Fifties, knows him as the Mississippi Hawk.

Brought to Belle Point, Arkansas, under false pretenses, by Fred Ginter, pseudo-gentleman and saloon owner, Campbell nevertheless feels obligated to carry out his fraudulently obtained

pledge to start a race in favor of Ginter's horse. But the other owner, Irene Claybourne's father, George, gets the drop on Campbell. The Hawk, glad to be freed from his distasteful duty, starts the race fairly. Ginter's horse is beaten. Claybourne offers the Hawk satisfaction on the field of honor, but Campbell says he is satisfied. Ginter plans revenge, and he has many tools, such as the Oklahoma bad man, Purse Venier.

Twice the Hawk has been accused of cheating at cards: once by Irene's jealous suitor, Lieutenant Metclaff, whom

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 19.

the Hawk refuses to fight because he is drunk; and once by Laurence Stevens, a cotton gin owner whom Ginter has blackmailed to the door of ruin. The Hawk, realizing Stevens is trying to commit suicide, finds out the cause, and offers him money to pay off Ginter's claims.

The next day the Hawk is arrested for murdering George Claybourne. Campbell's card was found in Claybourne's desk, demanding a duel on MacNelly's Island; and Claybourne's dead body was found there. In his hand was one of Campbell's duelling pistols—and the charge of powder had been extracted. It was murder! But Stevens had been with Campbell all through the fatal night, so he is released.

Uncle Matt Woodruff, Claybourne's brother-in-law, believed in Campbell's innocence at the inquest, and protected him from a mob secretly incited by Ginter. But Irene calls the Hawk a murderer; and Campbell, stung beyond endurance, swears he will make her apologize on bended knees.

Hunting the murderer, he sends Tangle-eye to trail Venier. Ginter, fearing the bad man will talk, stabs him and throws him in the river; but Tangle rescues him, and on MacNelly's Island the dying Venier, desiring revenge on Ginter, confesses the truth to Campbell.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE GRAY OF DAWN.

THE first part of Venier's confession only confirmed what Campbell had shrewdly suspected. Ginter, desperate for revenge upon Claybourne and the Hawk for that humiliating race, had ordered Venier to

take Ferguson's key and steal one duelling pistol and a calling card from Campbell's rooms.

Thanks to Campbell's interest in the affairs of Laurence Stevens—which had not come to Fred Ginter's ears—Purse Venier had little trouble in entering the rooms of the Hawk and abstracting the two articles. He found Ginter awaiting him in the back room of the Palace.

Ginter loaded the pistol without a charge of powder, carelessly fired it. Nothing but the faint explosion of the fulminate in the cap resulted. Then he ordered Venier to make his way around MacNelly's Island with a guide, Ginter's man Bagsdahl, who would conduct him from the clearing to George Claybourne's house and leave him there. In this way Venier would know how to conduct Claybourne to his supposed meeting with Campbell. Venier swore in admiration as he comprehended Ginter's fiendish plot. Taking the card on which Ginter had forged Campbell's challenge, Venier set out.

Thus it came that at four o'clock in the morning George Claybourne was startled out of a deep sleep to feel a hand upon his shoulder. It had been a simple task for Venier to enter the house noiselessly and find Claybourne's bed. His moccasined feet had carried him stealthily and silently to the side of the man he sought.

When he felt Claybourne stir, and knew that the man was awake, he whispered a phrase that chained Claybourne to silence.

"*Pssstt!* I come from Allan Campbell."

The rest was easy. Why Claybourne did not suspect anything because of the manner of his entrance Venier never knew. Of a surety Fred Ginter under-

stood the mind and mental reactions of a strictly honorable gentleman, for all that he was not one himself. Claybourne reacted to the spurious message exactly as Ginter had prophesied.

Claybourne did not even ask him about a surgeon, witnesses, seconds, or anything. The card Purse had handed him seemed to give him all the information he cared to have. He offered no objection when Venier said that they would walk the quarter of a mile to the river where he had a skiff waiting. The only question Claybourne asked was:

"Has Campbell pistols? Or shall I take mine?"

"He's got ev'rything," Purse grunted, secretly astonished at Claybourne's lack of intelligent suspicion. That it was faith in another gentleman's honor, Purse could not comprehend. It was with relief that he found himself leading the way toward the river under the paling starlight.

Purse took the oars, and they reached the island just as the east was suffused with a rosy glow. He landed on the river side of the spot to avoid observation by chance eyes.

As he led the way to the clearing Venier cautiously loosened one of his six-shooters in its holster. Claybourne drew his cloak closer against the chill mist. They entered the clearing at the end where stood the stone chimney, that lone surviving part of MacNelly's house. The light had grown strong enough to distinguish objects clearly at twenty or thirty paces. As Venier had expected, the spot was deserted.

"**H**OW is this?" the voice of George Claybourne broke on his ears. "Can we possibly have arrived before Campbell's party?"

Venier whirled on his companion.

"A long time before. Campbell don't even know you're here."

Claybourne stepped back a pace as his eyes searched the other's bearded face. "What sort of a ghastly hoax is this? Why did you bring me here?"

"Fer this!" snarled Venier, jerking out his gun.

He leveled it at the other. Claybourne paled as he read his fate in the killer's eyes. But he met his death as he met everything—face to face.

"You treacherous dog!" he grated as he hurled himself forward.

To his astonishment he did not receive the crashing impact of a bullet. Venier leaped backward from him, still menacing him with his weapon.

"Stop!" he growled. "Stand still!"

But Claybourne was too courageous a man to stop and accept his death without a struggle. And Purse Venier did not dare pistol his victim at point-blank range. Such a shot could never be made to look like a duelling mark at twenty paces.

Venier was in a quandary. He had wasted too much time in baiting his victim. Now he was put to it to withdraw far enough to shoot Claybourne at the proper range. He could not run backward at anything like the speed Claybourne ran forward. It was the most exasperating experience he had ever undergone—an armed man running from a defenseless, weaponless fool.

Before he had time to consider what was best to do Claybourne was upon him, grappling for possession of the pistol. This contact inspired Venier. He tossed the gun to the ground and wrapped his bearlike arms about the slenderer form of the other. He would subdue Claybourne physically, tie him against a tree, withdraw and pistol him at ease, then untie the body and plant the duelling pistol.

The subduing of George Claybourne was a matter easier considered than done. His strength was that of a maniac. It was all Venier could do to hold his own.

Venier suddenly began to wonder if he was to escape with his own life. This fear settling on his soul, he gave a violent heave and wrenched himself free. He leaped backward as Claybourne steadied himself on his feet and poised for another attack.

It was exactly at this instant that a single sharp report rang out in the clearing. Before Venier's amazed eyes a black spot appeared in the center of Claybourne's forehead. Without a sound the man crumpled to the ground. The survivor glared about with wild eyes. And there behind him, having come out from the shelter of the stone chimney, a smoking pistol in his hand, stood the figure of Fred Ginter.

"You're a clumsy fool!" snapped Ginter shortly. "I was afraid of you. That's why I am here. Get busy now! Turn him over and get the dirt out of his face."

In the smoothest part of the clearing they laid down the mortal remains of George Claybourne as though the man had dropped in a duel. The incriminating pistol of Allan Campbell's was placed in his stiffening fingers, and the pair, concealing the traces of struggle, hurried from the island.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CLOSING NET.

SUCH was the tale Purse Venier told Allan Campbell. With no means of staying the internal bleeding it was impossible to lengthen the life of the dying man. Campbell was exceedingly fortunate in having a

pint flask of whisky with him. This he administered to Venier as a stimulant time after time as the man was sinking. But no stimulant could combat successfully the drowning of lungs. It was more than he could have asked to hear the entire story of the crime before the angel of death snapped the weakening thread of life in twain.

As the last of the storm clouds rolled away, leaving the stars brilliant, Purse Venier slipped the cable that moored his life craft to shore and his disreputable boat was borne down the river of death to the sea of eternity.

Campbell placed his ear to the left breast. There was no need; the man was dead. He lowered the body gently to the ground—and found that he was kneeling in two inches of water. The rising river had curled and lapped up to their feet unheeded. Quickly the Hawk sprang to his feet.

"Bring Venier's body and follow me."

No other words were spoken as he led the way under the stars to the spot where he had left his boat. Here he could find nothing but the chain used for a painter. He tugged tentatively at the chain and felt a drag at the opposite end.

"Come, Tangle," he directed. "Haul the boat ashore and empty it. The rain or the current has filled and sunk it."

Campbell unearthed the oars from the spot high up on the bank where he had hidden them, and Tangle-eye bucked the strong current, reaching the mainland in safety somewhat below Stan Peters's place.

Campbell roused the farmer, a loyal friend of Claybourne and Woodruff, and requested a horse and wagon.

"I'll drive yuh in myself," asserted Peters, and was impervious to Campbell's protests.

"Glad to do it fer Matt an' poor Claybourne," he asserted. "Somebody'd have to bring my wagon home, anyhow."

In this wise they entered Belle Point just as the day was breaking, the wagon rumbling quietly through the muddy river road, the saddle horse patiently plodding along behind.

AFTER considerable search they found Matt Woodruff, who was spending the night at the coroner's. Rousing him, they drove down to his store. Tangle-eye carried Venier's body inside, laying it on the table behind the partition in the rear room and covering it with a blanket. Peters, assuring them that he would say nothing of the whole affair, drove back home.

"Humph!" grunted Matt Woodruff. "Reckon I oughta brought the coroner with me. How'd it happen? Looks like you been frog-giggin'."

They sat down, and Campbell, reloading his six-shooters with dry powder, related the events of the night in detail. When he had done Matt arose and reexamined the body.

"Reckon I'll git the sheriff an' go git Ginter," he opined.

"No, sir," was Campbell's amazing contradiction. "That is impossible at present."

Matt glanced at him fiercely.

"Unfortunately," went on the Hawk soberly, "there was no witness to Ginter's attack on Venier except my slave. There is no record of the dead man's confession except my statement, which is corroborated only by Tangle-eye. Considering Ginter's influence with the Western element of this town, my word against his won't go very far."

Woodruff considered this distaste-

fully, his gray eyes blazing angrily like those of an animal in the firelight.

"I reckon thet's so," he was forced to concede. "By thunder!" His face grew harder and more forbidding. Then he raised his eyes toward the ceiling and called out harshly to the clerks, who had just arrived to begin their morning chores out in front.

"Henry! I say, Henry! See if my six-shooter behind the cheese counter is loaded!"

The Hawk leaned forward and demanded quickly: "Where are you going?"

"To shoot it out with Ginter," replied Woodruff harshly. "He can't dodge a six-gun argument."

"No!" vetoed Campbell sharply. "Why do you suppose I took all this trouble to bring Venier's body here secretly?"

Matt halted and glanced at the covered form.

"I dunno," he admitted frankly. "Why?"

The Hawk motioned his black servant to the door.

"Let no one enter, Tangle," he commanded. Then: "Realizing that we have nothing by which to convict Ginter, I thought we might trap him into an admission of his crime."

Woodruff became interested at once.

"How?" he demanded.

"The details are yet to be worked out. There are several ways to do it. I think the best plan is to arrange a sort of tableau. Here, or at the courthouse, we can seat Venier's body at a table and have him in the act of signing a confession in the presence of the coroner and the sheriff. Then, without warning, you and I can conduct Ginter into the room and confront him with the body of the man that he believes to be miles down the river by this time.

Before we let him get close enough to see that Venier is dead, we can head him off and hand him a copy of the confession to read. As every word will be the truth, I have no doubt it will convince him."

"Son, you wasn't born yestiddy," complimented Woodruff warmly. "I wouldn't of thought of that."

The Hawk shrugged in deprecation of his ability.

"There are other ways, if we cannot induce the law to work with us," he went on. "We can show him the dead man privately and exhibit a forged confession that is actually signed. Here, however, we would be taking the chance that Ginter knows Venier's handwriting. Again, we can demonstrate, without trying to prove anything, that we know all about the matter. This might trick him into a betrayal."

"YOUR first plan is best," decided Matt. "Let's work thet out. By thunder, it's morning! You had any breakfast?"

Campbell shook his head, smiling faintly.

"I haven't eaten since the night before last," he admitted.

"Waal, let's go git some victuals first."

"Agreed," said Campbell promptly. "On the condition that you eat with me at the Dixie House. I must have a change of garments. Tangle, no one is to pass through this door until we return."

They passed out as the great negro took up his position squarely in the doorway. Woodruff declined the gun his clerk Henry offered him. As they stepped out into the dazzling, cool glory of an autumn morning after a night of rain, Woodruff suggested:

"Reckon we jes' as well round up the sheriff an' Coroner Fungall before we go back. I'll git 'em while you change your duds. 'Sfar as thet goes, you look all right as you are."

Campbell shivered in wry distaste and felt of the faint stubble on his cheek. His wordless reply was obvious, and nothing further was said as they walked along the stone flagging toward the restaurant.

Neither of them gave a thought to imminent danger. Purse Venier had not thought to tell Campbell that Ginter had already ordained the Hawk's immediate execution.

Wrapped in contemplation of the closing net about Fred Ginter, they failed to take heed of the net closing about themselves. They paid no particular attention to the two individuals who crossed the street ahead of them and sauntered along so as to intercept them. How was the Hawk to know that the two Shirley brothers, a pair of the most unregenerate scoundrels in Arkansas, had been combing the town for him since the afternoon before?

CHAPTER XVII.

ASSASSINS.

THE Shirley brothers were twins. That they were utterly dissimilar in all respects except the common trait of evil was not as much a fact for wonderment as the fact that they had reached the age of forty without being hanged.

Lester, the elder by some thirty minutes, was built on the lines of a bull, beefy, red-necked, and vicious. Meade, the infant of the precious pair, was a runt. He was not dwarfed exactly, but he was thin to the point of emaciation, hollow-chested and stoop-shouldered.

He resembled nothing so much as a chronic sufferer from indigestion who was always on the verge of belching.

Both of the Shirleys were bow-legged from a life in the saddle. Experts cowhands, they chose to live by illicit use of the branding iron and the six-shooter. Sneaking, low-brained, cruel, they were men of the too-free range.

They were deadly because they were treacherous. They shot first and then asked a victim to stand and deliver. Extensive gun practice, even of this sort, eventually developed their pistol ability to a degree of murderous accuracy. By name they were notorious, but by actual sight, little known, because few of their victims lived to give a description of their appearance.

Towns and settlements knew them not. It was healthier and more pleasant to lurk in the backwoods and on the plains to waylay the unwary. Thus, it was not surprising that Matt Woodruff failed to identify the two approaching men as the notorious Shirley brothers. That they were in the employ of Fred Ginter he would never have dreamed. None but a fool or a maniac would have turned such debased creatures loose in a respectable town. Once started on a debauch of blood, until they grew surfeited of the sport of butchering, there would be no stopping the Shirleys unless they were shot down like the mad dogs they were. They were as likely as not to turn on their own employer.

Having never seen the depraved pair, Matt and Allan Campbell advanced toward them unsuspectingly. Men with the gait of cow-punchers were no novelty on the streets of Belle Point.

The Hawk owed his life to the fact that Ginter had had no daguerreotype of Campbell to furnish his killers. All

they had to go by was a description of their victim. Now the Mississippi Hawk, after more than forty-eight hours without sleep and almost as long without food or a change of garments, to which was added a night's exposure to a bad storm, did not fit his description. He fitted it closely enough to arrest attention—his face and general erect bearing were unmistakable—but there was a reasonable doubt. Hence, the amiable Shirleys, to be certain of their quarry, reversed their usual program of slaying first and asking questions afterward.

The four met some fifty yards from the street corner and about the same number of feet from the entrance of the restaurant to which Woodruff and Campbell were going. Halting squarely in front of the two men so as to bar their way effectually unless they chose to step off the stone flags and walk around in the mud, the two Shirleys scrutinized their prospective victim closely.

LESTER, the bovine, held up a beefy hand, a hand that was red both figuratively and literally.

"Jes' uh minnit," he rasped. "Either one o' yuh gents know uh feller by th' name o' Campbell—Allan Campbell?"

"I am Allan Campbell," replied the Hawk, instantly alert. "Why?"

Lester glanced at his brother who seemed on the verge of belching in Matt Woodruff's face. Then he met the gaze of the Hawk.

"Uh—nothin' much," he rumbled. "Jes' heered thet uh man by the name o' Ginter's a gunnin' fer yuh. Thought I'd warn yuh. Thassall."

"Thank you," replied Campbell coolly, but civilly.

He stepped back a pace, half behind Woodruff, to allow his informant to

pass. It was at this instant that Meade Shirley came to life.

"Do hit now, Les!" he whined. "The ol' un ain't armed."

Simultaneously with his words he whipped out a heavy six-shooter and brought the long barrel down upon Matt's head with crushing force. Forced, whether or no, into an immediate hostility, Lester Shirley jerked out his ready gun and fired at Campbell from the hip.

A searing pain shot through the Hawk's left side. He spun halfway around and staggered, striving to keep his feet as he ripped open his coat. At the same time Woodruff crumpled to the ground without a murmur. Instantly Meade Shirley kicked him brutally in the abdomen for being in the way, and fired once at the reeling Campbell. But Campbell was already falling. One foot slipping off the edge of the stone flagging into the soft and yielding mud, he dropped to the ground. Meade's shot, meant for his heart, merely passed through the fleshy part of his neck.

Sure of their victim, the two murderous scoundrels took to their heels, one up the street and one down, before any one could run out of the buildings to intercept them. In running, they made the most serious mistake of a misspent lifetime. For Lester Shirley's shot had not been a fatal one.

Half on the sidewalk and half in the mud, a swiftly growing pain in his side, the Mississippi Hawk now had drawn his guns. Calmly resting an elbow on the flag beneath him, he leveled down on the fleeing Lester Shirley who was just opening the door to the restaurant, and pulled the trigger. The man jerked and fell headlong across the threshold, most of his body in the street.

Without waiting to observe the effect of his shot, Campbell rolled over and rested his other elbow on the walk and fired at the sprinting Meade just as the fellow turned the corner of the street.

The ball tore through the man's vitals from side to side. He dropped as suddenly as if he had been tripped, a scant three feet from the safety of a protecting stone wall.

As calmly as though he were merely practicing on a target, Campbell rolled back over and took a second shot at the form lying before the restaurant door. Then he turned once again and fired a second bullet into the writhing man at the corner of the street. Then, and then only, did he relax. He went abruptly limp, his head thumping cruelly against the rough stone flag.

It was a grim scene that would have inspired the hand of a painter of the frontier days. A deserted street—stores with false fronts—a man's form sprawled at the corner, another at the threshold of an eating house—each so near and yet so far from escape—in the foreground two men side by side: one with the blood trickling down his face, the other with a six-shooter in each hand, the smoke still curling upward, a bedraggled beaver hat beside him in the mud. "With their boots on!"—"The gambler's passing!"—"Gun harvest!" A thousand titles would fit the picture.

AFTER the brief fusillade of six shots there was a hushed silence.

Faces peeped cautiously out of windows and doors as there came no renewal of hostilities. Then storekeepers and customers poured out into the street. Running figures drew near from every direction. Willing hands sought to succor the various victims.

A deputy sheriff made his belated appearance. Dr. Wilson trotted out from his office, a fussy little man of cherubic rotundity.

The doctor examined the men as rapidly as he could proceed from one to the other.

"Hm—dead," he pronounced at the side of the runt, Meade Shirley. "Two wounds—both mortal. Hm—the big fellow's shot twice, also; dead before he hit the ground. Don't need a doctor here. Call the undertaker. Let's see the sharpshooter. God bless my soul! Matt Woodruff in this mess!"

He knelt and applied spirits of ammonia to Woodruff's nostrils. Thanks to the slouch hat that was part of his ordinary garb, Uncle Matt was saved a fractured skull. He revived under the biting effect of the liquid and shoved the stuff from under his nose.

"Take it easy, Matt," fumed the doctor. "No hurry. You need attention. Another whiff of this hartshorn. Hit anywhere? No? I'll patch your head in my office."

"By thunder, lemme alone," roared Matt, sitting up and gasping for breath, as his head rang and clanged. "Look after Campbell. Where is he?"

"Hm—nothing much wrong with you," opined the doctor. "Let's see the fourth one."

Wilson bent over the Hawk and made a quick examination.

"Hm—shot through the neck and left side. Bad, but not fatal. Lucky devil. Hm—reckon I'll have to patch him up."

"You're damn whistlin' we'll patch him up," snorted Matt testily. "An' we'll do it right now. Git busy!"

"Why, you speak like he's your friend," uttered the doctor in surprise.

"He is—an' you ain't, if you don't do the best job o' doctorin' in your life," retorted Matt bluntly.

Wilson motioned for a couple of volunteers to carry the unconscious and bleeding Campbell into his office.

"All-right, all right," he agreed. "Got to patch that torn place in your head, too. Into the house with you. Tell me what happened."

Matt Woodruff glanced at the two still forms which had been laid side by side.

"Them two jassacks committed suicide, that's all," he stated briefly. "They jumped me an' Campbell without warnin'. No reason, no provocation, no nothin'. That's my statement to the coroner. You can see the results as well as I can."

A man in the crowd swore in surprise. "These here is the Shirley brothers, sure'n hell. There's uh thousand-dollar reward for 'em, dead or alive."

The deputy sheriff took charge of the remains. The crowd took up the shouts of wonder and amazement at the passing of two vicious criminals. Speculation as to the reason for their presence in Belle Point was rife. Before night the town was abuzz with this exploit of the Mississippi Hawk. But Allan Campbell was unaware of his fame, oblivious of the excitement.

He did not recover consciousness during or after the ministrations of the surgeon.

"Hm—there's nothing else wrong with this chap," said the little doctor. "Didn't lose more than a pint of blood at the most. Flesh wounds both. Lucky to come out alive. Looks to me like he's dead for sleep."

"By thunder!" ejaculated Woodruff happily, remembering Campbell's condition. "That's what's the matter with

him. He's given out from exhaustion an' lack o' food."

ALLAN CAMPBELL came to his senses in his own bed in the elegant rooms at the Dixie House where Matt had had him brought. He oriented himself almost immediately. As he attempted to turn his head a twinge of pain in his stiff neck recalled all that had transpired.

"My God!" he murmured aloud. "I can no longer count on one hand the men I have killed."

Such was the first conscious thought of the Mississippi Hawk. That he did not need to inquire whether he had killed his men was a logical thing; but lamentation or sorrow over bloodshed was an emotion new to the heart of this gallant duellist.

At the sound of his voice Tangle-eye leaped to his feet and hurried to his side.

"Lawdy, Marse Allan," he whimpered. "Ah's sho' proud to see yo' open youah eyes."

Campbell laid a hand on the negro's arm and smiled quite steadily. "Get my lounging robe."

"Nawsuh, nawsu," declared Tangle-eye quickly. "Yo' is to stay right in bed—de doctah's ordahs, Marse Allan."

"Don't be foolish," chided his master. "You know I can't stay here in bed. There's much to do before night. Have you forgotten this morning?"

"Dis mawnin'? Lawdy, Marse Allen, dat was yestiddy mawnin'. Yo' done slept since noon yestiddy. To-day am Friday, suh."

"What?"

Campbell sat bolt upright in bed, consternation writ across his features. A severe pain shot through his side and he fell back, dizzy and faint.

"See dar, honey," mourned Tangle-eye, fetching a glass of water and holding it to his master's lips while he propped Campbell's body up tenderly with one strong, black arm. "Yo' is a sick man. Nothin' much but two lil scratches, but it 'll be a day or so 'fo' yo' can git up. Dey ain't nothin' to fret yo', Marse Allan. Marse Woodruff said tell yo' dat he is tendin' to ev'rythin'. Drink dis heah watah, an' den eat youah dinnah."

"I guess you are right, Tangle," murmured the Hawk quietly. "It's too late for me to do anything now. Mr. Woodruff is quite competent."

"Dat's right, suh. He sho' is a fine man, Marse Allan. Brung yo' heah fust an' told 'em all to do jes' what Tangle-eye tells 'em, an' den he brung me heah to take care of yo'. He said he had lots to do an' couldn't stay, but fo' yo' not to worry, 'cause he was gwine take care of ev'rythin'. An' he sho' must be doin' it. Dis mawnin' we got a note f'om missy."

"What's that? Tangle, bring it here at once."

"Yassuh, yassuh," replied the negro hurriedly. "Heah it am."

He produced a dainty little envelope of pale blue which his master seized eagerly out of his great, black paws. The delicate scent of jasmine which the message exuded gave the Hawk an indescribable feeling of ecstasy which he was loath to lose by breaking the seal. The envelope was addressed to "Allan Campbell, Esquire," in a firm, round hand. How like its mistress was this missive!

AFTER a brief moment of revelling in the touch of the envelope he abruptly tore it open and, his face settling in that baffling, inscrutable mask which hid his emotions from

even his slave, he read the letter. As he had feared, it was far from being a tender message from the heart. And it was through this missive that he became aware of the identity of the men he had just killed.

The letter began very abruptly:

SIR:

Mr. Woodruff, my uncle, has informed me that he is convinced of your innocence of the murder of my father. While he had no proof to offer which overbalances the fact that my father died facing somebody whom he took to be you, Uncle Matthew was very emphatic. I believe he has promised utter and absolute proof of your innocence within the next twenty-four hours.

In the meanwhile, sir, it is my Christian duty to thank you for the saving of my uncle's life yesterday morning when you slew those terrible Shirley brothers who attacked him. Uncle Matthew has given you great credit and painted your heroism in glowing colors.

If I have misjudged you, as Uncle Matthew seems to think, in truth you will be entitled to a humble apology. Until I am confronted with such overwhelming proof, I remain, sir,

IRENE CLAYBOURNE.

That was all. A very stiff and formal note. He was a fool to have expected more. Obviously, however, Matt Woodruff had been at work in his interest, having falsified to some extent the exact facts of the gun battle with the Shirleys and the reason therefor. It had been that fabrication which had won for Campbell this meager crumb of recognition. This was not the vindication and contrite apology he had set out to win.

It was obvious from the tone of the letter that Woodruff, at the time he had talked with his niece, had not revealed the identity of the murderer. The old man had been wise enough to keep the matter to himself until he had

apprehended Ginter. As this was now afternoon of the following day, Woodruff should arrive any minute with the news that the last act of the tragedy was over.

In the meanwhile the Hawk was forced to witness the close of the chase from the spectators' box. Incapacitated in the very hour of final victory and success, put out of the combat by those villainous Shirleys at the most awkward moment, there was nothing for him to do but wait passively for some one else to perform the task he had set himself. One of Fate's ironical jests!

It taxed Tangle-eye's ingenuity to get his master to eat his food. After a fashion he succeeded, although Campbell would pick up the pale blue sheet of paper between mouthfuls and fall into a reverie which Tangle-eye patiently punctured with prosaic forkfuls of food.

Uncle Matt came in due time to see him. When the old man arrived, Allan was still toying with the note, his eyes staring moodily off into space.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TO FLUSH THE QUARRY.

THE twenty-eight hours which elapsed between the wounding of Allan Campbell and the arrival of Uncle Matt to find the Mississippi Hawk awake and in possession of all his faculties, had been busy hours for the old man. Two or three of those precious units of time were lost in anxious attention to the wounded man. To free Tangle-eye from guard duty so that the black could wait on his master, Woodruff abruptly disposed of the Venier matter by placing the body in a spare coffin in the dusty back room of his store.

After he became satisfied that Campbell was being properly cared for and that everything was running along as smoothly as was possible under the circumstances, Woodruff bethought himself to carry out the Hawk's original plan to trap Ginter. He sought out Sheriff Bruce as the first step in the plot. He found that officer in his office at the courthouse reading over various circulars and papers in search of the notice he had last received on the Shirley brothers. Fortunately, Bruce was alone.

"Howdy, Matt," he offered, glancing at his caller. "Come in and sit down. Be through in a few minutes."

Woodruff glanced at the reward notices on the sheriff's desk and surmised at once just what was engrossing the man's attention.

"Find it?" he inquired briefly.

"What?" demanded Bruce.

"Notice on the Shirleys," snapped Matt. "That's what you're lookin' for. Don't play innocent with me."

"No, I haven't found it," replied Bruce. "But I have it here somewhere."

"Waal, look for it later. I've got something to talk to you about."

"You wish to tell me that Campbell applies for the reward?"

"Nope. That's between you an' him. I got an idea thet if you work right smart now Allan'll waive the entire reward over to you."

"What is it you want to talk about?" said Bruce briskly, swinging around to face Uncle Matt squarely.

"I know who killed George Claybourne," stated Matt bluntly.

"You do? It wasn't Campbell?"

"It wasn't Campbell," repeated Woodruff shortly.

"You want to swear out a warrant, I suppose. Who is it?"

"Not so fast. I want to talk with you first."

Bruce halted his hand and eyed the speaker frowningly.

"Nev' mind the warrant right now, I tell you," snapped Matt. "Listen to me. I know who done it an' how he done it an' why he done it. Understand?"

Bruce nodded briefly.

"But I ain't got legal proof," added Woodruff. "I've gotta make the criminal betray himself, an' I know jes' how to do thet. But I need your help. How about it?"

"Who's the man?"

Woodruff studied the big sheriff thoughtfully and keenly. Finally he opened his lips and answered.

"Fred Ginter," he said.

BRUCE started as suddenly as though bee-stung.

"What? You're not meaning that Matt?"

"Jes' that."

"Shh-h—not so loud," cautioned the sheriff. "Somebody might hear you."

"I'm expectin' you to," rejoined the old man meaningly.

"I do, I do," Bruce hastened to say.

"I heard you the first time. And d'you mean to say that you haven't any evidence against—the man you named?"

"None to produce in court," replied Woodruff sourly, noting the sheriff's hesitancy. "But I will have it inside of two hours, if you'll get busy an' do as I tell you."

Bruce narrowed his eyes and stared speculatively at his caller who brought such astounding news. He pursed his lips thoughtfully. Then he slowly shook his head.

"Can't do it, Matt," he stated carefully.

"You don't know what it is I want you to do, yet," snapped Matt.

"Can't help it. If your plans went wrong, where'd I be? Ginter controls half the county."

"An' I don't represent th' other half; is thet it?" remarked the old man sarcastically. "I can't pledge you any political support a-tall, seein' as I am sorta betwixt an' between. You're nothin' but a job-huntin', spineless imitation of a man."

Bruce bristled.

"Them are hard words, Woodruff."

"By thunder, I'm a hard man sometimes, Bruce."

The sheriff was the first to be propitiatory.

"I know it, Matt," he complained. "Call me a job-hunting sheriff if you want to. What would you be with a wife an' eight children to keep in shoes an' bread? You know I'm not afraid, but I've got my own interests to look after. Now, if you was to swear out a warrant, plain and blunt, I'll go arrest your man right now."

"You damn fool!" roared Matt in exasperation. "I jes' told you I can't swear out a warrant an' make it stick. I got less concrete proof than we had on Campbell—an' thet wasn't enough."

Bruce waved his hands helplessly. Woodruff realized that he was to get no assistance from this quarter.

"All right," he rasped bitingly. "Reckon I can't force you to do what I'm askin'. But, by refusin', you may be forcin' me to kill Ginter myself."

"That would save a lot of trouble," agreed Bruce smoothly.

"Bah!" growled Matt in disgust. "However, I may do jes' thet. In the meantime, you keep your mouth shut. If you can't act, you better not talk."

"Don't worry, Matt," assured the sheriff earnestly. "An' don't hesitate

about comin' to me to arrest your man. You know I perform my duty."

Woodruff left the office without responding. However, he knew that Bruce had spoken the truth. Politician though the sheriff might be, he was not a cowardly man. Neither was he owned by any faction. His hesitancy was caused by the feeling that he could not afford to throw in his fortunes solidly with either of the two predominant factions in Belle Point. Elected twice by a narrow majority, he was looking forward to a third term.

But these considerations did not help Matt Woodruff in his present dilemma. While he was thinking things out, he went to the Claybournes, not having seen his sister and niece since the day before. The burial of George Claybourne took place quietly during that afternoon. Despite his anxiety to return to the Dixie House, Uncle Matt spent the night at home. The fact that he had not succeeded in making much of an impression upon the heart of his niece with his story of Allan's gallant fight with the Shirley brothers made it all the more apparent to Matt that the Hawk's way of entrapping Ginter was the only method of exonerating the Mississippian.

THE first thing Matt did Friday morning was to go to the Dixie House. Upon learning that Campbell had not yet regained consciousness, Woodruff came to the conclusion that he must act without further delay. He could not keep the body of Purse Venier indefinitely.

Uncle Matt's plan was a sort of hybrid idea which chose the intermediate course between subtle trickery and a blunt showdown. He made his way to the Palace before going to the

general store. As he had figured, he proved to be an early customer. He chatted briefly with the bartender, intentionally exciting the man's interest.

"Funny thing about Campbell, wasn't it?" Matt offered as a starter.

"Yessir," agreed Joe without batting an eyelash. "Nobody knowed the Shirley boys was in town, did they?"

"Don't reckon so," rejoined Matt carelessly. "Several funny things been happenin' right recent."

"Yeh?" remarked Joe noncommittally.

"Yep. Funny thing happened to me yestiddy mornin'," went on Woodruff, downing another whisky with some ostentation. "Reckon I'll find out how George was really killed before to-night."

Joseph pricked his ears in genuine interest. He was as much in the dark as every one else.

"How's that, Mr. Woodruff?" he asked curiously.

"Flood water backed over part o' Claybourne's plantation," remarked Uncle Matt studiously, careful not to tell a downright lie, and leaving all explanatory pronouns out of his speech. "Flood water does strange tricks."

"Sure does," agreed Joe. "But what's that got to do with the Claybourne murder?"

"The body of this here Venier was found with a knife wound in the chest."

"You don't mean it?" gasped Joe. "You mean the shanty-boater?"

"Nobody else."

"Well, what d'you know? Who killed him?"

"He wasn't dead," said Matt shortly.

"He wasn't? What did you do with him? Did he say how it happened?"

"He wasn't able to tell all he knew," replied Woodruff craftily. "But he knew a whole lot about the

killin' o' George Claybourne. He said he would tell it."

"An' did he?"

"Not to me. I got him over to my store now—takin' care of him. Guess Bruce 'll be after somebody with a murder warrant before night."

"So he hasn't talked yet?"

"I'm going back to him now."

"Where'd you find him?" inquired Joseph. "Above the second bend?"

This was a point-blank query. It would have been impossible to answer this evasively. Matt must either tell the truth or a lie. He chose the former course.

"I didn't find him," he said bluntly. "I got him now, but he was brought to me."

"Who found him? Sheriff Bruce?"

"Allan Campbell," replied Woodruff crisply, concluding the interview before Joe could worm another truth out of him. "I've gotta get back to Venier now an' see if he's able to tell me anything yet."

"Sfunny I hadn't heard anything about that," frowned Joe, calling after his departing customer.

"Nobody knows it yet. I wouldn't of told you if I wasn't sure thet the cat'll be out o' the bag by noon. Don't you dast tell anybody, Joe. I oughtn't of said anythin' to you even."

"Oh, I won't, Mr. Woodruff," Joe promised quickly.

Uncle Matt went his way, perfectly confident that the guilty man would be apprised of the facts before twelve o'clock by an unsuspecting henchman. Wherein he was figuring accurately.

MATT WOODRUFF had indeed scarcely crossed the threshold when Joe's apron was off and he was searching for his hat. Soon he was closeted with his employer.

"Say," he began, "there's a lot goin' on that we don't know all about, Mr. Ginter. If we'd of known what I learned this mornin' you wouldn't of had to hire them Shir—"

"Silence!" ripped out Ginter. "You damned fool! Do you want to put your neck in a sling?"

"Excuse me," cringed Joe.

"Your mouth is too loose, Joe," warned Ginter blackly. "People with loose mouths don't live overlong."

"It's lucky for you that some of them do," offered Joe sourly, "or you couldn't prove that Campbell killed Claybourne."

"What do you mean?"

"That's just what I come to tell you. That Indian trapper you hired from Oklahoma has been wounded an' found, an' Bruce is out with a warrant for the murderer of Claybourne."

Ginter stiffened and then started erect.

"What! Say that again!"

"The sheriff found the shanty-boater, and he's tellin' that he knows who killed Claybourne."

"Where was Venier's body found?"

"Flood water carried him up Claybourne's creek."

"And he wasn't—dead?"

"No. He's over at Woodruff's store right now. Woodruff is nursin' him."

"Bruce found him? Bruce?"

"Ain't Bruce been workin' on this murder tryin' to detect the man what did it?"

"Detect nothing!" snarled Ginter. "Bruce couldn't follow a wounded elephant through a two-foot snow. Blind luck! How the devil was Venier still alive? I can't understand it." He was thinking aloud. "You say that Venier is making a confession to Woodruff? Or did you say that he had already done so?"

Joe cogitated. "Woodruff told me that Venier was recoverin' from his knife wound an' was gonna talk this mornin'. That's it. An', of course, he'll tell on Campbell."

Ginter merely glared his contempt. "Campbell!" he grated fiercely, discretion flung to the winds. "Damn those Shirleys for botching the job! And damn Campbell!"

"Say!" cried Joseph suddenly. "It wasn't Bruce, it was Campbell who found Venier. That's it. I had it twisted."

Ginter jerked as if he had been shot. His face contorted into a vicious mask.

"Are you sure you haven't got everything twisted?" he demanded.

"Nope. I got it straight now," stated Joe positively. "It was Campbell who brought him in. Woodruff said so."

Ginter's eyes darted about the room like those of a trapped animal. An appalling thought had just come to him. Suppose Campbell had pumped enough out of Venier to know who shot Claybourne?

What if the Hawk had been on his way to get Ginter when the Shirleys intercepted him?

He attempted to figure the muddle out. If, on the other hand, Venier had been beyond speech, Campbell had learned nothing. No one had learned anything. In that case, the best thing to do would be to get to Venier before he had time to talk, and finish the job of knifing which had been half done the night of the storm.

Ginter was on the verge of putting this idea into practice when he thought again of the Mississippi Hawk. The latter had leaped from a worry to an alarming Nemesis. The man had only been slightly wounded. He might be—

probably was—up and out looking for Ginter.

THE saloon owner had a bad attack of nerves. He was on the verge of panic, the cowardice in his soul breaking through under the strain which was on him now.

"Get out!" he snarled at the stolid Joe. "Get back to the saloon. Tend to your business, and keep your mouth shut!"

"But—but, I was just telling you that Venier is goin' to give the murderer away. It 'll get Campbell."

"So it 'll get Campbell, eh?" sneered Ginter sarcastically. "And why would Campbell bring to town a man whose testimony could send him to the gallows?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Joseph as he grasped this point he had previously overlooked. "Then Venier don't know nothin' about Claybourne's death at all?" puzzled Joe aloud. Then a vast suspicion began forming in his mind, the results of which showed in his eyes.

Ginter glared at the speaker, and proceeded to wither that suspicion before it could blossom.

"Know anything about it? He knows all about it," he grated harshly. "Venier killed Claybourne himself. Who do you suppose knifed Venier? The dead man? You fool, I did it. He cornered me the night of the storm in his houseboat and tried to hold me up for ten times the sum he was to get for the Claybourne affair. When I refused him I had to fight for my life. I thought I killed him. Now, if he is likely to die so that I can't send him to the gallows, he'll confess. Oh, yes, he'll confess—and lay his own crime on me out of revenge."

Joe gasped. "What 're you gonna

do? Get him before he can do it? He's at Woodruff's store."

"I'm going to kill you if you don't button up your lips and get back to your saloon," snapped Ginter viciously. "You tend to your end of the business, no matter what happens. Tell all the other men to do the same, and to know nothing about anything. Leave this matter to me."

Thus Matt Woodruff's plan to flush his quarry into making the necessary first move was well launched. But the reaction that Matt expected did not materialize. While he waited at his store for the coming of Ginter the entire morning passed quietly.

Sending for Fungall to come for the body of Purse Venier, Matt examined his gun, put on his hat, and went out. But Ginter was not to be found within the limits of Belle Point. No one had seen him, none of his men knew anything about his movements. That he had taken flight did not seem probable because all of his business activities were running along as usual. He had drawn no money from the bank. It was as though he had simply ceased to exist.

By the time he reached the Dixie House to consult with Campbell, Uncle Matt was badly worried.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEMESIS PURSUES.

CAMPBELL, looked up with unseeing eyes as his manservant ushered in Matt Woodruff. Then, suddenly recognizing his visitor, his face lighted in keen inquiry while he quickly thrust the disturbing note under his pillow. Woodruff sat down in a chair and sighed in relief.

"By thunder, Allan," he said testily,

"I thought you'd never wake up. How you feelin'?"

Campbell smiled faintly.

"A bit sore and painful in the neck and side, sir. Otherwise, I am all right—physically."

Woodruff surveyed the Hawk critically, his keen eyes missing nothing. He pondered that reply.

"How'd you shave with your neck bandaged up like that?"

Campbell indicated the grinning Tangle-eye.

"The next time you shave him, Tangle-eye," directed Matt bluntly, "cut off thet mustache an' thet little thingummy on his chin."

"Don't you like them?" asked Campbell.

"I don't. They sharpen your appearance till you look like the hawk folks call you. Shave 'em off! I know a young-woman who'd like you better without 'em, too."

In spite of himself, Campbell flushed a trifle. "Indeed?"

"Yep, I do. I notice she wrote you a note, after all. What did she say?"

Campbell looked a bit disconcerted. He rallied at once. "Why did you tell her all that? I did not save your life. You have gained me a sort of apology under false pretenses."

"How d'you know you didn't save my hide?" returned Matt promptly. "I reckon you never heard of the Shirley brothers."

"I have not," the Hawk replied, shaking his head and then flinching at the quick pain in his neck.

"Waal, I'll tell you somethin' about 'em, so you won't think I'm such an awful liar. You see this here patch on my topknot? An' you remember how the little devil cut down on me soon's he saw I wasn't totin' my gun? You saved us both, son." He proceed-

ed to give a brief account of the notorious twins. "But thet ain't what I come here for. It's about Fred Ginter thet I want to talk. The man's disappeared." He told what he had learned.

"You say he has drawn no money from the bank?" asked Campbell, frowning at the news. "And nothing indicates a flight on his part?"

"Nothin'. He'd be too slick to run until he knew we had proof against him."

"Undoubtedly. I wonder what his game is?"

"You'd of done better than I did, Allan," mourned Matt regretfully. "I reckon I butchered up the job."

"No, sir. If you have failed, then I could never have succeeded. Ginter is a master of cunning. You will note that he was careful to see that there were no other witnesses on the island in case, as it so happened, he had to commit the crime himself. He dismissed this Bagsdahl after the man had guided Venier over the ground. Since we have failed to trap Ginter this way, we must start all over again through this Bagsdahl. At least, we know—"

THE clatter of galloping hoofs along the street at breakneck pace caused the Hawk to pause involuntarily. For some reason the mad rhythm of those thundering hoofs startled them all. Tangle-eye ran to one of the front windows to gaze out on the hasty rider. Before the slave could speak, the slithering, sliding noise informed the two men at the bed of the stopping of the horse in front of the tavern. The negro turned an astonished face to them.

"Lawdy!" he ejaculated. "It am dat sojer man on dat race hoss. He am comin' heah, an' he sho' am a sight."

"Metclaff? On Kentucky Girl?" cried out Woodruff in sudden alarm, starting to his feet and running toward the window. "An' here comes a posse o' six men down the street behind her. Bruce is headin' 'em. What the hell?"

Campbell did not speak. He turned his eyes to the door as the sound of running feet was heard on the stairs.

Tangle-eye turned from the window "Dey's aftah Marse Allan again," he declared in swift alarm, picking up a chair. "Dis time dey's gonna be a daid niggah on the floor, fust."

Before he could reach the door of the suite of rooms it was flung open and Lieutenant Metclaff was reeling into the antechamber.

"Back, Tangle!" commanded Campbell as the officer appeared in the doorway of the bedchamber.

The lieutenant was a bloody ruin. His uniform was torn and gory. He was hatless, and there were clots of blood in his hair. That he was borne up by desperation alone was evident. He was nearly fainting from weakness. His gaze flicked around the room until it rested on the figure of Matt Woodruff.

"Mr. Woodruff!" he gasped out. "It's terrible. Without warning that fellow Ginter appeared on the plantation just before noon with two ruffians, and carried off Irene. We were taken by surprise—I was not armed—I resisted and was knocked unconscious. I came right to town for sheriff—posse following me—have horse for you—was told I'd find you here—come on if you want to ride with us! Ginter headed westward."

He staggered about and started to leave.

"Here!" snapped Campbell. "Sit down! Tell us exactly what has hap-

pened. Get him some whisky, Tangle!"

Woodruff was at the lieutenant's side before the officer had finished speaking. Now he supported the exhausted soldier, who would have fallen to the floor as he reeled about.

"Take it easy, son," Matt said gruffly. "Here, drink this. Now, say all that again. Jes' what happened?"

Metclaff explained, a trifle less wildly. "I can't understand it!"

"I understand it, by thunder!" roared Matt, his wrath breaking like a storm. "What a fool I've been, guardin' the wrong hole. Scared 'im too damned well! Let's go, young feller."

"Wait!" commanded the Hawk in crisp accents. "Don't be too quick to jump at conclusions. Why did—?"

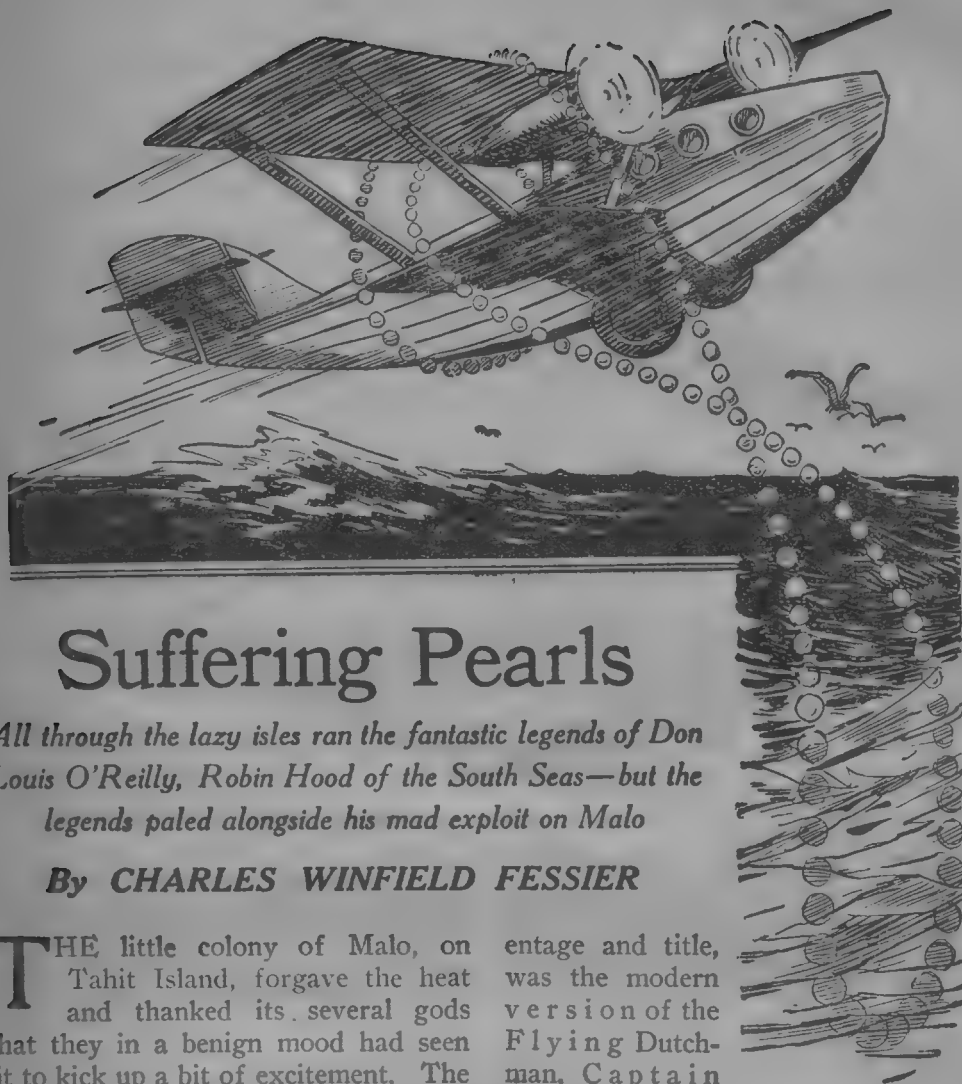
"I should of shot that devil without tryin' to trick 'im," raged Woodruff. "That's the answer. It ain't your fault, son. It's mine. Come on, Metclaff. But mebbe you better stay here; you ain't in any shape for a hard ride."

Metclaff responded by leading the way to the door just as the huge form of Sheriff Bruce filled the entrance.

Woodruff almost shoved him out through the door, the lieutenant crowding close behind, his fiery black eyes blazing like two red-hot coals. The wounded Hawk and his slave were left alone in the apartment. The negro looked at his master with frightened eyes.

"Marse Allan," he whimpered, "don' look like dat, Marse Allan. Jes' tell me what to do, an' Tangle-eye'll go right straight an' do it. Jes' tell me what to do."

"Get my clothes!" answered Campbell in a terrible voice.



Suffering Pearls

All through the lazy isles ran the fantastic legends of Don Louis O'Reilly, Robin Hood of the South Seas—but the legends paled alongside his mad exploit on Malo

By CHARLES WINFIELD FESSIER

THE little colony of Malo, on Tahit Island, forgave the heat and thanked its several gods that they in a benign mood had seen fit to kick up a bit of excitement. The one café was filled with men of many nationalities who bought a great amount of wine from Gaston, the proprietor, as they chattered excitedly about the promised visit of Don Louis O'Reilly, the mysterious winged pirate who gave the enlisted men aboard South Pacific cruisers of assorted nations something more to do than polish brasswork and holystone decks.

Mala had right to be excited. Don Louis O'Reilly, of Spanish-Irish par-

entage and title, was the modern version of the Flying Dutchman, Captain Kid, and the Cid.

The fact that he owned and operated the latest type amphibian airplane gave him three dimensions in which to roam, and set him thousands of feet above any possible rivals in the business of fracturing civilized law.

Beside that, Don Louis O'Reilly had that essential stamp of genius, such as lifts a boxer from the ranks of the palookas and makes of him a champion—a colorful and unexpected style

of attack. In less than six months, this outlaw, who had come from nowhere, had managed to make his name known and respected over the scattered islands of the South Seas.

Don Louis would raid the pearl fisheries of some big corporation, climb back into his amphibian, and disappear as suddenly as he had arrived. There are many coral-sheltered lagoons into which a plane may drop and there remain concealed from the eyes of the uniformed and prying gentlemen who inhabit the crow's nests of battle cruisers.

Don Louis was as elusive as the trade winds. He had built his success by the simple, but not easy, method of failing to be at certain places simultaneously with his prospective captors.

Therefore it was a subject of considerable comment that Don Louis O'Reilly should have let it be known through devious channels that he was about to honor the insignificant colony of Malo with his presence.

"What you t'ink?" inquired Gaston, the café proprietor. "For what reason should this man of great badness visit us? Can it be that we are about to be rob'?"

"Hell, no," stated an American known as Jackson. "What have we got that he'd want? He wouldn't bother with guano, and that's all this island produces in the way of wealth. He's got something up his sleeve and it probably isn't a deuce."

JEAN LA TOUR, who represented French authority on the Island of Tahit, shouldered forward and drained a glass of white wine.

"It is the bluff," the pudgy little man announced, tugging at the end of a waxed mustache. "Would the outlaw with the price on his head run into

the arms of the law? Bah, I would capture him like that."

Jean La Tour snapped his fingers to indicate the dispatch with which he'd snare the rash visitor.

"Yeah," agreed Jackson. "Just like that. I heard tell of an officer who attempted to capture this Irish-Spaniard; sad to relate, that officer is now walking with a great deal of difficulty and a crutch, on account of his leg being broken."

Into the group shouldered a bull-necked, red-faced and yellow-eyed person newly arrived at Malo and known as Mr. Lansing. He and a small pock-marked individual had visited the island the day before. The pock-marked man had promptly disappeared into the bush and had not reappeared.

"You make me sick," Mr. Lansing announced somewhat rudely. "You talk like this Don Louis O'Reilly person was tough people. Hooey! He's only one man, ain't he? Who cares if he does drop in on us? Little Nell here would make a corpse of him in just one word—boom!"

Little Nell proved to be a revolver nestling in a holster under the speaker's arm. It looked quite capable of saying *boom!* and thus sending an ordinary man forth to learn for himself the answer to the perplexing enigma of life. Jean La Tour applauded Mr. Lansing's martial sentiments and the two of them drank more white wine while painting vivid word pictures of what would occur in the event of Don Louis O'Reilly's advent.

In the meanwhile the only women on Tahit, Mrs. Jackson and her spinster sister, Miss Mary Cooper, sat at a table drinking lemonade and chattering at a great rate of speed.

"A regular Robin Hood, my dear," stated Mrs. Jackson, "he's always

helping the weak. Why, a month ago he raided an island near here and severely punished Jefferson Dewar, the overseer. I think he killed Mr. Dewar. The overseer had been mistreating the natives and Don Louis O'Reilly won't stand for that, my dear."

Miss Mary Cooper registered the proper amount of appreciation for the gallantry displayed in slaughtering a man by name of Dewar for mistreating varicolored natives.

Half an hour went by and suspense grew apace. Ears were strained and the café door was opened frequently by anxious gentlemen. Now that they had prepared for it, Malo's inhabitants would feel disappointed if Don Louis O'Reilly didn't keep his engagement.

ALL at once the buzz of conversation within the café ceased, being displaced by a louder buzz overhead. Soon the sound increased to a snarl and then a roar. The listeners were tense. It was the voice of an airplane motor. Nothing could be seen in the velvet blackness of the sky but the heavens were alive with sound. The plane circled the café several times and then neared earth. The roaring gave way to a contented purr. The plane had landed, not far away.

There was a great babble of excitement within the café. Men scattered about, moving swiftly, but with no positive destination, no objective. Then the male population of Malo stood still and decided upon action.

Armed with an assortment of weapons which included several defunct brandy bottles, Mr. Lansing's "Little Nell," and Jean La Tour's carbine, the group moved resolutely out into the night. Malo announced in many tongues that it was going to show the pop-eyed world that no damned aerial

pirate could raid its shores without having the fear of the Lord and considerable lead instilled into his being.

The crusaders returned after a while—and collective eyes bulged at sight of a tall, lithe young man engaged in the polite business of mixing a cocktail for Mrs. Jackson and her spinster sister, Miss Mary Cooper, both of whom seemed to be getting a huge thrill out of the affair.

The mysterious mixer of cocktails was in himself worthy of note. His hair was particularly out of the usual; it was black and glossy and yet red. That is to say, a red tinge showed about the temples and in streaks at the crown.

The eyes were a pronounced and innocent shade of blue. The face was hawk-like with a humorous up-twist at the mouth. Dressed in correct and natty flying attire, the stranger was indeed an imposing figure.

"Gentlemen," he greeted the closely packed group in the doorway. "I am showing the ladies the formula and mechanics of a delightful, yet mild concoction I had the pleasure of tasting while in Paris. Did you bag any?"

"Any what?" asked the puzzled Mr. Jackson.

"Tigers or bears or raccoons or whatever it was that you sought to kill with that imposing battery of lethal weapons," answered the stranger, eying the crowd with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

Apparently prodded forward by some one's foot, Jean La Tour approached the speaker.

"Are you," he gulped, the carbine held hesitatingly before him, "Don Louis O'Reilly, the pirate?"

The man whose hair was black, and yet red, grinned disarmingly—which remark can be taken two ways.

"You amaze me," he said, reaching

out and deftly relieving Jean La Tour of his carbine, "have you not seen the posters attached to bell buoys, coral reefs and palm trees urging my demise? I thought the likeness was excellent. Perhaps I neglected to shave with due care this morning."

ALTHOUGH the Maloans had known quite well that the visitor was none other than Don Louis O'Reilly, it was considerable of a shock to them now that the individual had eliminated all possible doubt as to the question.

The redoubtable Jean La Tour backed away while his erstwhile ruddy complexion underwent a swift transformation. The group at the door shifted uneasily under the calm scrutiny of Don Louis O'Reilly, and the two ladies gasped in delight.

Jackson whispered something into Mr. Lansing's ear and Mr. Lansing unwillingly reached for his left arm-pit. With a pantherlike agility as unexpected as everything else about him, Don Louis O'Reilly leaped across the room and had "Little Nell" safely in his hand. Mr. Lansing's teeth seemed to be snapping at his tongue.

"Is this, then," inquired Don Louis, "the hospitality extended by Malo to guests? Is it the custom to produce revolvers and other things with which to annoy visitors?"

He turned to the assemblage, which promptly backed away, inasmuch as "Little Nell" seemed to be pointed at each individual.

"Would you be so kind as to deposit your young arsenal on the bar?"

The gentlemen thus addressed were kind indeed. They even got in each other's way as the weapons were deposited at the place suggested. Although Don Louis O'Reilly was smil-

ing there was a cold, calculating look in his eyes that sent chills up and down a score of spines.

"And now be so kind as to be seated. I have some questions to ask of you."

The gentlemen were seated. In response to the clatter of a handful of coins, the gentlemen were served with wine by Gaston, who was first of all a café-keeper; he couldn't find it in his heart to allow even the arrival of a particularly notorious air pirate to interfere with business.

Don Louis O'Reilly seated himself atop the bar and surveyed the group with an unmistakably Irish twinkle in his eyes; but he addressed them in a suave voice that smacked of Spain.

"Be so kind as to hear my story," he asked. "One week ago I had the honor of raiding an island near here, with the honest intention of borrowing a few trifles, including pearls. I expended considerable effort in the raid, inasmuch as I had heard that the inhabitants of the island had discovered a rich pearl oyster bed."

DON LOUIS lighted a cigarette and blue clouds accompanied his words.

"Now as you gentlemen probably know, a pearl is the valuable result of an affliction suffered by an oyster. Pearls are born through suffering and reaped through misery. First the oyster is perturbed by the unwelcome arrival of a foreign substance, which it promptly coats with a secretion; this in due time becomes a pearl, a possession shared alike by oysters and women. Then the oyster is further annoyed by being taken from its natural element through the efforts of native divers. As you well know, native divers inhabit this earth but briefly.

due to the pain of going without the proper amount of air for too long a length of time."

Here Don Louis waved his revolver carelessly and Mr. Lansing thought better of securing "Little Nell's" sister, a tiny revolver secreted under his trouser leg.

"Therefore, gentlemen," continued Don Louis with an appreciative nod to Mr. Lansing, "that suffering is the price paid for pearls, you must admit. The oyster suffers, and the diver suffers; with the result that they both die. Is it not logical, therefore, that the owner shall suffer in turn? I see no room for argument. Feeling that I was merely forwarding the infinitely wise plan of Nature, I landed my plane at Munu Munu and awaited the arrival of a few loyal followers who were also desirous of assisting Nature. Then we set about securing a few pearls for our activity."

Don Louis O'Reilly paused and his face became stern.

"Will you be so kind," he said swiftly to Jean La Tour, "as to assist our friend in the corner? It appears that there is something in his trouser leg which annoys him. He behaves much as I imagine an oyster behaves while manufacturing a pearl. Please assist the gentleman."

Jean La Tour had been brought up to respect authority, and Don Louis O'Reilly was the personification of authority. Obediently La Tour removed the tiny revolver from Mr. Lansing's well-concealed holster and tendered it to Don Louis.

Don Louis acknowledged this courtesy with a smile and continued with his story.

"Imagine my perturbation, gentlemen, when I found that there were no pearls at Munu Munu. Think of it!

After all that effort, not even a seed pearl. It seems that I made an error in visiting Munu Munu from the start. Munu Munu is inhabited solely by an unusually attractive and wistful girl named Florence Martil; her aged uncle, Ben, and a score of natives whose names I neglected to secure. Miss Martil was — was, I say — the owner of the pearls. It was wrong that she should suffer because of the lack of them. Nature does not demand that woman suffer through ownership of pearls. The woman is the pearl's ultimate destination." Don Louis gestured gracefully to the two ladies present, and proceeded:

"Upon my arrival at a small shack I found Miss Martil nursing her aged Uncle Ben, who had, quite inconsiderately, been shot in the back and severely wounded thereby. The pearls had been stolen. Miss Martil was indulging in the luxury of tears—an occupation that annoys me grievously."

Mrs. Jackson and her sister smiled approvingly. Don Louis bowed acknowledgment.

"AS I stated," he continued, "a woman's tears annoy me. They cause me to suffer. Miss Martil was sobbing as if her heart were quite beyond repair. You might say that I had only to leave Munu Munu and thereby alleviate my suffering. But no. You cannot escape the effect, even though you may leave the cause far behind. I knew that even though I could not see the girl's tears nor hear her sobs, she would continue to shed tears and sob indefinitely. She is that kind of a girl."

Don Louis shrugged, a true Castilian shrug.

"She had, you see, labored six months to secure a fortune in pearls.

She did this with remarkable fortitude. But with the fortune stolen from her, and with a wounded relative on her hands, she is naturally inconsolable. I admit I could have relieved her of the latter difficulty by shooting the wounded uncle, but she may not have understood my motive, and I hate to be misunderstood."

Assembled Malo stirred uneasily. What was Don Louis O'Reilly getting at?

"Be patient," urged Don Louis, noting this. "My story will soon be at an end, and you will learn that it has a positive bearing upon my visit to you. Very positive, indeed. Miss Martil related to me a story of disgusting lawlessness coated by a thin veneer of legality. She stated that three white men, accompanied by half-breeds of a far higher social order than they, had stripped her of her pearls. They had displayed a permit probably purchased from some person who had failed to locate the pearl bed and had left in disgust. These men had allowed the girl and her uncle and the natives to labor for the wealth and then had taken it through a revolting ruse. When Uncle Ben objected, a bullet was sent into his back with the result that he is suffering severe pains. That was the reason for Miss Martil's tears. They will continue to be shed until she regains her pearls. See, even she is suffering the pain originally felt by the oyster."

Don Louis O'Reilly leaned forward and scrutinized the faces of his audience.

"I have investigated the matter," he continued. "I learn that such practice is the habit of a certain unprincipled person who lacks the courage to steal honestly. I have learned that the stolen pearls were not taken away from Munu Munu. Perhaps fearing detection, or

perhaps to give color to the pretended legality of their actions, the despoilers concealed them on that island, thinking to return for them at a later day. They concealed them very well, I may say; I could not locate the pearls. But," he smiled, "I have traced the robbers to this island."

This announcement caused considerable excitement. Many glances were directed to Mr. Lansing, who fell to trembling violently.

"I think I have found my man," stated Don Louis. "You all glance at the gentleman in the corner. I take it that he is a recent arrival. His companion, no doubt, is in hiding. However, this man will do. I will take him with me."

Mr. Lansing pleaded for assistance. Failing in that he demanded assistance. There were no offers. There was a marked dearth of human sympathy.

Quite calmly Don Louis O'Reilly terminated his never-to-be-forgotten visit to Malo by dragging Mr. Lansing through the café door and out into the night.

IN obedience to the command of Don Louis, backed by the gaping muzzle of "Little Nell," Mr. Lansing clambered into the cockpit of the plane, cursing bitterly all the while. Don Louis extinguished a cigarette and entered the pilot's cockpit. He opened the throttle and the motor roared with enthusiasm. Then, flying skillfully, he lifted the heavy plane from the ground and sent it curving into the night.

Don Louis hummed an Irish tune as he piloted the plane over a vast amount of water. Then the humming ceased, and he applied himself to the business of making a landing. With the skill he had acquired as a war flyer, this debonair South Seas pirate fishtailed for loss

of altitude and then side-slipped to a smooth landing on the surface of a lagoon which extended into a small island. The plane was as seaworthy as a small yacht.

"Have the kindness to accompany me," Don Louis O'Reilly requested of his passenger.

Mr. Lansing ungraciously obeyed. Having exhausted an extensively profane vocabulary, he was painstakingly starting all over again. He had reached the stage of improvisation by the time he had been marched along the strand to a cottage through the window of which a yellow light gleamed.

An attractive though white-faced woman opened the door in response to Don Louis's knock.

"Did—did you get the pearls?" she asked anxiously.

"Regrettably, I did not," stated Don Louis. "But as you see I have captured the thief."

Miss Martil's eyes sought the red-faced man and a look of horror came into them.

"That's the man who shot Uncle Ben!"

This remark caused agitation upon the quilted surface of a near-by cot and a weather-beaten face peered forth. Undoubtedly it was Uncle Ben.

"Ye're dog-gone right he did," stated the aroused old man. "In the back, the dirty crook. He stole the pearls, too, he did."

Then Uncle Ben transferred his attention to Don Louis O'Reilly.

"What be ye a going to do?" he inquired. "Ye admitted ye came here to steal the pearls. Then ye promised to get 'em back. Be ye a going to steal 'em after that?"

"Most assuredly not," stated Don Louis. "I have brought this man for the purpose of regaining your pearls.

I have discovered that they are hidden on this very island."

"Well, make 'im talk," demanded Uncle Ben, wincing at a pain in his back.

Miss Martil forgot all else then. She hovered over Uncle Ben, smoothing down his quilts and uttering tender words. A motherly expression came to her face. She was wistfully beautiful.

DON LOUIS motioned Mr. Lansing to a chair. The red-faced man obeyed surlily, a defiant look in his yellow eyes.

"Now," said Don Louis, "be so kind as to tell us where you concealed the pearls."

"Won't," said Mr. Lansing flatly.

Don Louis produced a revolver and held it near Mr. Lansing's nose. The man shrank back in the chair, but there was still a resolute look on his hard-bitten face. It was obvious that Mr. Lansing didn't want to engage in any form of conversation.

"Can't remember?" purred Don Louis, cocking the revolver.

"Remember, but I won't tell," stated Mr. Lansing. "I come by 'em legally. Be damned if I'll give 'em up to a pirate."

Don Louis's finger tightened on the trigger. A wild, hunted look came into Mr. Lansing's eyes, but he remained silent. Don Louis pulled the trigger and there was a flashing roar. Miss Martil screamed and Uncle Ben gasped. Mr. Lansing slumped forward.

"You will observe," said Don Louis calmly, "that I did not shoot him. It was my intention to frighten him. I succeeded. A little water, please."

Miss Martil produced a pail of water which was doused over the inert

form. One of Mr. Lansing's eyes opened and seemed surprised that it could see. Thus encouraged, the other opened and Mr. Lansing sat up, an amazed look upon his face.

"The next shot may not miss," stated Don Louis. "Are you going to tell us where the pearls are hidden? Or shall I kill you?"

"Damn you, I won't tell," said Mr. Lansing stubbornly. "My pearls. Legal. If you kill me you'll never find where they are," he added quite logically. "If you don't I won't tell anyway."

Having disposed of this question, Mr. Lansing secured a good grip on the bottom of his chair and seemed prepared for anything in the nature of violence.

"I think he means it," stated Don Louis sadly. "I know his type. He'd rather die than give up the stolen wealth. I don't believe even torture would wring his secret from him. Therefore I'll spare myself the trouble of torturing him."

A look of deep appreciation passed over Mr. Lansing's face. He breathed more easily.

Miss Martil leaned across the table and sobbed, her wealth of golden hair flowing over crossed arms.

"What—what will we do?" she asked of no one in particular. "I had planned to take the money from the pearls and study art in Paris,—and Uncle Ben was going to buy a ranch in California. Now—now we can't. We haven't a cent."

The dainty shoulders shook pitifully and Don Louis stirred uneasily. Mr. Lansing was unmoved.

Again the quilted cot erupted and Uncle Ben took a hand in proceedings.

"Shoot 'im," he suggested to Don Louis. "If he won't tell, shoot 'im

anyway. He shot me in the back, he did."

Uncle Ben's voice implied that the wound in his back was good and sufficient reason for shooting anybody. Don Louis O'Reilly rejected this suggestion, but there was regret in his bearing. Miss Martil's sobs continued to fill the room. Don Louis glared balefully at Mr. Lansing, who maintained a sullen silence. Mr. Lansing would be damned if he'd talk, and that was that.

SUDDENLY there was a confused sound from the blackness outside.

Miss Martil's frightened face was turned toward the door. Don Louis did not move.

Then the door of the shack burst open and there leaped into the yellow light a large, yellow-haired man, followed by a crew of evil-looking natives and breeds. The blond man's pistol pressed into the small of Don Louis's back, and Don Louis promptly elevated his hands. Miss Martil screamed and backed slowly toward the far wall. Uncle Ben made remarks appropriate to the occasion, but no one heard them.

The sudden change in the situation had an electric effect upon Mr. Lansing. He sprang to his feet and borrowed a pistol from a lemon-yellow native, who promptly produced another from his belt.

"Fine work, Ozro," beamed Mr. Lansing, patting the blond giant on the back. "Just in time. But how'd you happen to come?"

"Speck came back from the bush on Malo, and learned that you'd been captured, sir," stated Ozro. "He sent us in the sloop. Speck says he'll be along later, sir."

"Very good, very good," said Mr. Lansing almost jovially. "And now

the tables are turned, Mr. Don Louis O'Reilly."

Don Louis, whose hands were still in the air, seemed to have no remark to make anent this statement.

"Yes, sir," gloated Mr. Lansing. "We'll see who gets the pearls. We'll see."

His face beaming really with gloating joy, Mr. Lansing proceeded to bind Don Louis O'Reilly to a chair. Then he started to perform the same service for Miss Martil, who shrank away in terror.

"Be a man," suggested Don Louis. "Leave the lady alone."

"Don't be a fool," snorted Mr. Lansing. "Think I want her to untie you? Not by a long whistle I don't. She'll be tied, too. Then I'll run across to the cruiser base and inform the captain where to find you. It'll be a matter of an hour or so and that'll be the end of you, you damned Irish spigoty!"

"I will remember that last remark," promised Don Louis, his eyes flashing.

"Please do," mocked Mr. Lansing. "Also, send me a piece of the rope they use to hang you."

Despite her struggles, Miss Martil was tied to a chair. Uncle Ben, who was voicing curses at a great rate, was lashed to his cot.

Mr. Lansing bowed with aggravating politeness and bade farewell.

"Soon," he said, "the great Don Louis O'Reilly will be in irons. In the meanwhile, don't play with matches or you'll set the house afire."

Then he left with his variously colored crew of cutthroats.

Don Louis sighed and looked at the ceiling.

"I'm—I'm sorry," ventured Miss Martil timidly. "I know you came to rob us in the first place, but then—then

you tried to help us. Now you'll be captured. I'm awfully sorry."

"Even more sorry than about the loss of the pearls?" inquired Don Louis.

THE girl was silent for a moment. "I think I am," she finally admitted. "Uncle Ben and I can get some more pearls, but you—you'll be captured, and they'll hang you."

Uncle Ben writhed as much as possible considering the efficient way he was bound. Vehemently he denied the probability that there were any more pearls in the world, or that there was a chance that he and his niece could get hold of them if there were. Furthermore, he stated, he didn't give a particular hoot in hell if they did hang Don Louis O'Reilly approximately a dozen times from an extraordinarily high scaffold. Plainly Uncle Ben was becoming a cynic.

"Will—will they surely hang you?" inquired Miss Martil, after the storm in the cot had subsided.

"Maybe they'll shoot me," stated Don Louis. "Don't worry, however. I've been expecting it."

Miss Martil fell to sobbing. Don Louis again cast his eyes ceilingward and whistled a bar from an old Irish air.

Miss Martil raised red-rimmed eyes to Don Louis, and her sobs increased at thought of this handsome young man being permanently spoiled by either hanging or shooting.

"I—I did want to go to Paris to study art," she said, "but—but—I'd give all my pearls to save you."

Don Louis thanked her for the thought, but suggested that art might prove a more profitable investment in the long run. Uncle Ben violently agreed with him, adding that the meas-

liest ranch in California was also worth much more than Don Louis's neck or any other part of his anatomy.

Then abrupt sounds—hurried, determined footsteps approaching from out of the night. Miss Martil shuddered.

"Maybe," she whispered, "they're coming for you."

"Maybe," Don Louis admitted.

The door was flung open by the man whom Mr. Lansing had addressed as "Ozro." He entered, followed by the same assorted cutthroats.

Miss Martil was too frightened by now to utter sounds. A native drew a wicked-looking knife and advanced toward Don Louis. Miss Martil suddenly regained her voice in a healthy shriek. The native calmly slashed Don Louis's bonds, and the young man arose and stretched.

"All right?" he inquired of Ozro.

"All right," replied Ozro.

"Fine," commented Don Louis. "And the pearls?"

A chamois-skin sack was thrown on the table. Miss Martil, who had also been released, reached for the sack and gasped as she opened it.

"Ours," she said unbelievably.

"Didn't imagine Mr. Lansing would talk," said Don Louis cheerfully. "I arranged for that rescue to happen so he'd exhume the pearls. Then my men seized him."

"YOUR men?" asked Miss Martil. "Surely," stated Don Louis with an engaging smile. "As soon as Mr. Lansing and his friend, Speck, reached these waters, I learned that he planned for something startling in the way of wholesale lawlessness. He was seeking a crew. Wishing to maintain my monopoly on crime hereabouts, I kindly instructed certain

of my men, including Ozro, to join the organization.

"After Mr. Lansing's raid upon your island, he had the good luck to give Ozro the slip long enough to conceal the booty. I came to look for the hidden fortune and failed. Therefore I went and got Mr. Lansing. My plan for making him reveal his secret was a success."

"Oh!" gasped Miss Martil.

"Have the men take Lansing's vessel back to our base," Don Louis instructed. "We'll have a navy yet, Ozro, my boy."

Ozro saluted, and the cutthroat crew followed him outside.

"Adios," said Don Louis, bowing.

"Won't you take some of the pearls?" asked Miss Martil, proffering the bag. "I'm so happy that I—"

Don Louis O'Reilly grinned.

"Compared to the other pearls, Mr. Lansing managed to acquire with the help of my crew, yours are a mere handful," he stated. "You see, my men trailed Speck into the bush of Malo Island this evening, and captured him with the main cache."

Uncle Ben stated that he'd, no doubt, live to see Don Louis O'Reilly hanged for a blanked thieving pirate, but his voice lacked any degree of enthusiasm.

A moment later the roar of an airplane motor sounded, circling the shack once and then boring away into the night.

It was then that Miss Martil voiced the last gasp to be recorded in this story.

She had discovered that the bag contained twice as many pearls as had been stolen from her. Moreover, the pearls were each twice as large as the biggest pearl carted away by the red-faced Mr. Lansing.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



RAILROAD MEN!

GOOD news for you, and for all others who enjoy good railroad fiction and fact articles! Another new member is about to join the Munsey family—or, rather, an old-timer who has been away for a few years is about to return and start life anew as a vigorous and sparkling member of the Munsey group.

On November 30 the *Railroad Man's Magazine* will again appear on the news-stands and will be published monthly thereafter. From its beautiful cover to the last word on the last page it will be a treat for all railroad men. Watch for it!

A NEW FEATURE

IN response to many requests for photographs and information about our various ARGOSY authors we have evolved a plan to acquaint you more thoroughly with the men who write our stories. Beginning next week each issue of the magazine will have as a special feature a photograph and biographical sketch of one of its contributors. All your favorites will step up and introduce themselves sooner or later.

Next week it is H. Bedford-Jones.

FIRST this week comes a note from George Parke, who has contributed some of our special feature articles. Says he:

Covington, La.

Set it down that I am one of the original "old readers" of the ARGOSY. I bought the

first copy of the *Golden Argosy* for boys and girls and read "The Boy Broker" and tales of Otis and others for the entire period that it ran as a boys' paper. I continued to read it all through the time it absorbed the *Priscilla*, the *All Story* and other magazines, and I still read it with enjoyment. I suggested that the firm issue a button to old-timers as an evidence of their loyalty. When I read in the early copies how to make a photograph camera and followed the directions so well that I succeeded in getting some good pictures, I did not expect that some day my name would appear in the index along with the great ones. Maybe I can rise still higher if I live long enough. I was born on Roosevelt's birthday, sixty-two years ago.

GEORGE PARKE.

ALL the way from Australia comes this very exhaustive analysis and criticism:

East Dullwallinn, Western Australia.

Find enclosed money order for thirty shillings, which is my subscription for another year of ARGOSY. I have been reading your publication for almost three years now and am quite convinced that it is the best all round fiction magazine in the world.

Of the one hundred and forty-two serials that have been published up to the time of writing, in my reading of ARGOSY, there has been not more than about a dozen that I did not like, such as "The Future Eve," "The Rhinestone Helmet," "Golden Fetters," "The Black Ace" (*Madame Storey* is the bunk), and the *Semi Dual* stories; however, some people seem to like these stories, and it is your intention to try and please all. I consider the following to be about the best: "Personality Plus," "Face Value," "The Spectral Passenger," "Those Lima Eyes," "World Brigands," "The Apache Devil," "Adventurers All," "For Country," "The Branded Man," "Thundering Dawns," "Under Cover Charges," "Swords Are Out," "Captain Nemesis" and "Man Hunt."

Your two best writers are naturally, J. I. Lawrence and Fred MacIsaac, and without these two I don't think ARGOSY would quite be ARGOSY. Some people were writing about

the way Fred MacIsaac varied his stories. It is my belief, however, that Lawrence must surely beat him for variety with stories of the Romans, early days in the Netherlands, World War, European principalities, American Civil War, the West, the South, and last, but not least, the chain stores. I would like to see another chain store serial from this author's pen.

Of the new writers, W. Wirt and F. V. W. Mason stand on their own; that is, apart from J. Allan Dunn, Frank L. Packard and Victor Rousseau, all three of whom are old favorites of mine, and I hope sincerely, that they keep on writing for the *ARGOSY*. "The Lost Lagoon" started off splendidly; likewise "The Big Shot." "The Branded Man" was a fine story, and I think that Mr. Payne must have been suffering from toothache when he was reading it. "The Constant Reader" wants to open his egg before declaring that it is bad, and not go off half-cocked after reading the first installment of a story. "The Master of Airlie" was great.

I would like to see another railroad serial from Don Waters; his short stories are about the best you print at present. Thomas Thursday is great. "It Takes All Kinds to Fake a World" brought forth many chuckles; ditto "Competition Is the Strife of Trade." Would like to see more Western yarns, especially by George M. Johnson and J. E. Grinstead. Am looking forward to "Blood on the Snow." I like the impossible stories by Ray Cummings, Garret Smith and Slater LaMaster. "A Brand New World" and "The Phantom in the Rainbow" were two fine stories. In closing I must say that I like the stories of William Merriam Rouse, and would like to see a serial from this author's pen. Also "The Impulsive Mr. Morrison," "High Barbaree," "Circus Blood," "Robbers' Roost" and "Blue Blood and Red," are the best novelettes since John Holden's "The Last Thousand Miles."

G. H. WARREN.

A BOOSTER for historical stories stands up to defend his favorites:

Baltimore, Md.

Have just been reading *Argonotes* in issue of August 10, and disagree with the letter signed "Johnny Lynch," wherein he begs you not to print any more historical serials.

Inasmuch as I started to read the *Golden Argosy* when "The Young Acrobat of the Great North American Circus," by Horatio Alger, Jr. (I think), began, and "Dick Broadhead," by P. T. Barnum, my attention, as a child, having been brought to it by a sample copy distributed around my home, I think I might be allowed a voice now.

While I can not say I have read every copy since then, as there have been times when I felt the stories were not up to the *ARGOSY* standard for a while and stopped reading it, not so long ago I was attracted to it again by some of the historical novels you were publishing and started to read it regularly again; so, if you depart from this virtue I shall again become a non-reader.

Just why Mr. Lynch should be so selfish in urging you not to print stories that are welcomed by hundreds of your readers, especially when you have four continued in each issue, is a mystery. Personally I don't care for railroad stories and I notice you promise to print two of them in the near future, but that would not prevent me from buying your magazine provided you did not shut out historical and unusual stories—such as "The Planet of Peril." All your stories are pretty good, but Westerns and mystery stories can be bought in most any magazine. If Mr. Lynch is so desirous of crime stories only, such as his list would indicate, let him buy the detective story magazines now so plentiful, but keep your magazine individual and run the historical and off-the-trail stories regularly, together with the kind of fiction he desires. I am not hog enough to want all of the kind I like best.

RICHARD DALLAS.

AFTER reading this letter we got the impression that the writer does not care for Talbot Mundy's yarns. But remember, Mr. Smith, lots of other readers do:

Bronx, N. Y. C.

As a reader of the *Argosy* for quite a number of years, I feel at liberty to express my opinion of the magazine. The story that brought me to the *Argosy* was "The Return of George Washington," by George Worts. I am a science fiction fan. All stories of the past, the future, other planets and time traveling appeal to me very much. My favorite author is Ray Cummings. Many of the *Argosy* readers seem to think that Slater LaMaster's "Phantom in the Rainbow" was the best story of 1928, but my belief is that Ray Cummings's "A Brand New World," was the best. It was a story that kept me interested all the time. It was full of action throughout, and showed the great preparation the author must have taken in writing this masterpiece of a story. Now for a few little complaints I must make. I agree most heartily with Mr. Richardson's opinion of Talbot Mundy. Mundy is not only the worst writer in the *ARGOSY*, but he is also the worst writer I have ever read in my life, and that takes in a lot of reading. The story which I have just

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

I did not like.....
because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

11-9

finished reading, "Beyond the Law," was a good story, but it seems to me as if the author was fishing for a sequel. The way he ends the story leaves you up in the air. Is *Tafosa* really killed? Will the hero marry *Kate*?

HERBERT L. SMITH.

AND a few good suggestions:

Kent, Wash.

I don't care a great deal for short stories, but find one I like once in a while like "A Contract Is a Contract," by John A. Thompson.

I like best, stories like "The Planet of Peril." That was a dandy.

The best stories I ever read were the stories about *Miles Cabot* on Venus. I wish we could have some more of them. And why can't we have a sequel to "The Sea Girl"? I would like to see what happened to the sea people when they went back into the earth. I think that is a chance for another fine story.

How about some more about *Madame Storey*? I sure enjoy those stories; they are so refreshing.

It isn't possible for me to name all the authors and their stories I like, so I will just say, keep up the good work and I, for one, will be satisfied.

I have been reading the *Argosy* for ten years and have no kick coming.

B. R. RUFF.



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—slashing production costs to save Spear friends 30%—**GIVING AWAY 3 beautiful lamps in addition**—Spear challenges the whole country to beat this Biggest of all Bargains... this beautiful, new style, 3-piece Overstuffed Velour Suite.

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This luxurious suite would sell for \$90 and up, anywhere else. It's the newest in furniture! Velour living room suites are the latest fashion. The newest in lamps, too—the new style matched set, all 3 the same color. How can we offer such a remarkable value? Well, here's the secret! It's original with Spear. We made the Davenport a few inches shorter than the usual models (the costly kind)—saved inches to shave dollars off the price. You'll never realize it. You would never know, if we didn't tell you. You'll have to measure it yourself to find the difference. It's a highly practical size.

This Davenport is 64 in. wide overall, instead of the usual 72 in. Then we dispensed with the costly removable cushions—another Big Saving. The surprising thing is that most people like this Davenport better. In short, we kept the quality, eliminated the frills. Davenport is 64 in. wide overall, 52 in. wide between arms. Back 19 in. high. There are 18 coil springs in the seat.

Another striking feature of this suite is the new style Club Chair and Club Rocker to match the Davenport. Suite is built with sturdy Hardwood frames, in beautiful brown Mahogany finish. Covering of serviceable blue and taupe Figured Velour, drawn smooth and snug over sanitary interior upholstering materials. Extra comfortable. Extra sturdy. Club chair and rocker 32 in. wide overall. Seats 21 x 20 in. Backs 21 in. high. 5 coil springs in the seat of each chair, well padded. The ideal size for modern home.

The Set of 3 Lamps—

GIVEN AWAY—are regular \$15 to \$20 value. They are truly beautiful. In polychrome finish, with turned metal shafts, graceful arms and polychrome metal bases. Shades are lustrous Rayon Seco, plaited over Rose Sateen lining, finished with metallic braid and decorated with a spray of Rayon Taffeta flowers. Each lamp has one socket, long connecting cord and 2-piece plug. For electricity only, bulbs not included. Floor lamp 61 inches high. Shade 17 x 13 inches. Bridge lamp 57 inches high, with adjustable arm. Shade 11 x 8 inches. Table Lamp 19 inches high. Shade 14 x 9 inches. Your choice of All Rose or All Blue shades. State preference.

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